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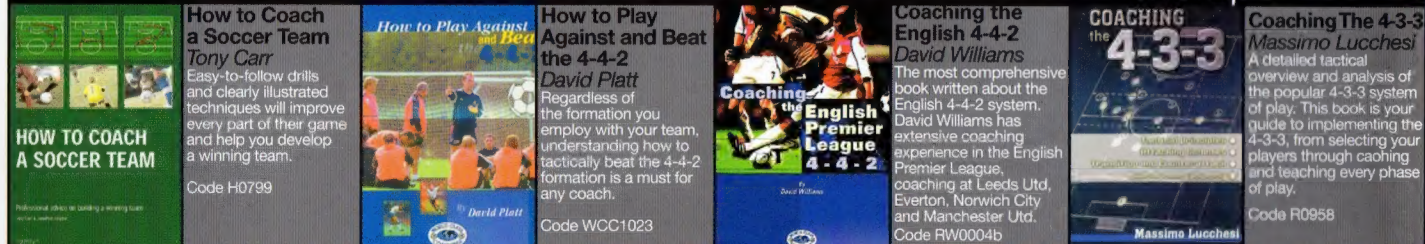
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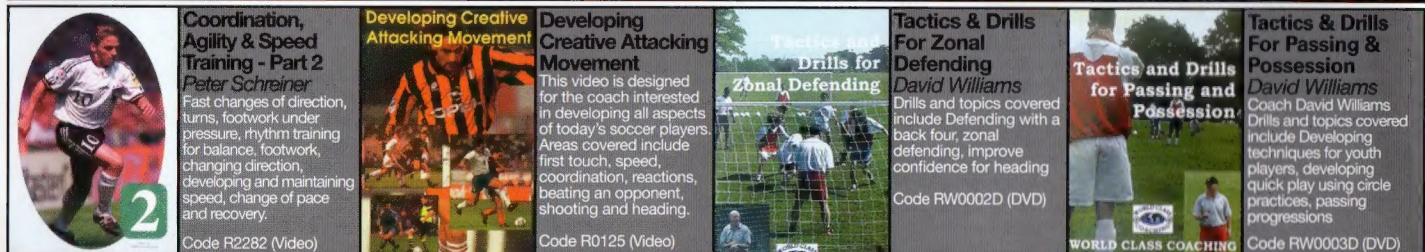
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SUMMER 2006

WORLD SOCCER comment

WELCOME TO OUR World Cup special edition. For everyone at the magazine, it's the culmination of months of hard work, and we hope it provides you with everything you need to negotiate your way through the 64 matches of Germany 2006.

Every World Cup feels special and this one is no exception. It promises to be the most open tournament for many years. The playing conditions in central Europe will provide a much more level playing field than in the Far East four years ago. It's not absurd to suggest that more than half the teams have a genuine chance of lifting the trophy on July 9 in Berlin.

A European World Cup usually produces a European winner, the exception being Brazil in Sweden in 1958. Yet this time round, the European teams have no discernible advantage. Brazil and Argentina will have squads composed almost entirely of Europe-based players, while outsiders such as Ivory Coast and Iran enjoy European connections their predecessors never had.

The players will have had more preparation time than four years ago but injuries and burn-out are still a major worry. England's chances have been rocked by the foot injury that is likely to keep Wayne Rooney out of the tournament, all of Italy is waiting on the fitness of Francesco Totti, while Argentina's latest "new Maradona", Lionel Messi, could also miss out. The fear remains that the winners will be the last team standing and not the side that have played the best football over the previous month.

Every one of the national coaches interviewed on these pages will have noted the limited but hugely effective tactics employed by Greece at Euro 2004 and the uninspired hard-running approach of South Korea and the United States in 2002. It's probably fruitless to hope that the coaches will encourage their teams to put on a show for the watching billions. Yet the truly great sides are the ones "that always want to win, but are not afraid to lose", to quote Marco Van Basten on page 67.

A final hope is that the tournament passes off peacefully, on and off the pitch. We need strong referees who will punish violent play while also letting the games flow. A major concern is that FIFA has not selected the best officials for the job, but rather a representative selection from the respective confederations. Keeping things within the "FIFA family" keeps certain people happy but is bound to end in tears. But then it wouldn't be a World Cup without a spot of refereeing controversy, would it?

As with previous tournament preview editions, we have taken the decision to increase the cover price to pay for extra pages. We're back to our normal price for the next issue - look out for our review of the European season (on sale June 9) and our complete World Cup review (on sale July 14).

Wherever you watch the World Cup, enjoy!



Gavin Hamilton, Editor (gavin_hamilton@ipcmedia.com)



SAVE MONEY ON WORLD SOCCER SEE OUR SPECIAL SUBSCRIPTION OFFER ON PAGE 12

TWO STRATEGIES TO MAKE WORLD CUP 2006 **EXPLOSIVELY FUN** FOR YOU

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continued on the next page ...



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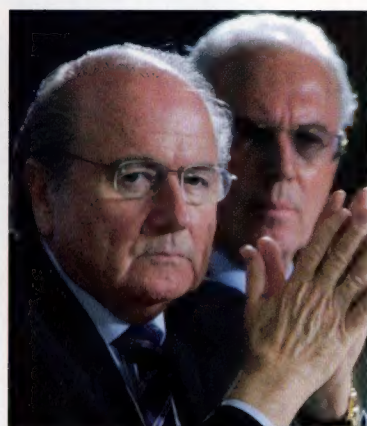
Keir Radnedge COMMENTARY

In the money

The World Cup has never been more valuable financially – but problems remain with ticketing and security



Cheers...Frankfurt mayor Achim Vandreike shows the official FIFA wine for Germany 2006



At odds...Blatter and Beckenbauer

SEPP BLATTER WAS NOT a happy man when his FIFA executive voted for the 2006 World Cup finals to go to Germany. Now, after six peaceful years of Swiss-German cross-border co-operation, Blatter is growing irritable again.

Suggestions of an increasing rift between the World Cup "owner" and its German sub-contractor were firmed up first by the president's whinge about ticketing and then by reports that FIFA does not want Franz Beckenbauer, president of the German organising committee, to be among the opening ceremony speakers.

Straws in the wind but blowing in an obvious direction. FIFA is distancing itself from the locals so it can deflect any flak when there are problems with ticketing or security, or both together, in June and July.

Financially, FIFA is already on to a winner. Indeed, the World Cup has never been more valuable. The

world body announced profits of £94million for the last financial year, up from £69m in the previous period. That is remarkable considering FIFA operates on a four-year financial cycle with the World Cup as the major income generator; indeed, the only income generator.

Advertising experts forecast that this year's event will be the first sports tournament to top \$1bn (or the less catchy £540m) in worldwide

'Experts say the World Cup will be the first sports tournament to top \$1bn in worldwide turnover'



Brand awareness...sponsors have paid millions to be involved at the World Cup party

turnover, and FIFA has already underpinned the next eight years by signing up six top-level sponsors – Emirates Airlines, Visa, Hyundai, Coca-Cola, Adidas and Sony. All except Coca-Cola are paying about £105m each for the right to plaster their names across the promotional and advertising packaging in which the football matches are wrapped. Coca-Cola has signed up until 2022 at £270m.

Financial return

As for the size of the sums involved, no wonder the world's clubs – and not only those in G-14, as FIFA and UEFA would have fans believe – are growing impatient to get some financial return for the players they lend so FIFA can cash in.

Visa's arrival on the scene is the most controversial move in the sponsorship sector. MasterCard, long-time monopoliser of the World Cup's financial services sector, claims FIFA did not properly open up the first-refusal clause in the current contract. No doubt the lawyers will make a killing on the fall-out, but FIFA will not worry. One way or the other it will still rake in the cash.

A view sometimes aired is that FIFA is concerned more with financial paraphernalia than footballing practicalities. Certainly, Danny Jordaan, the head of the successful South African bid for the 2010 World Cup, has noted that FIFA's demands between 2006 and 2010 varied in favour of a greater insistence on financial and corporate issues. In 2000, Blatter wanted the FIFA

Perhaps, over-confident in German organisational capacity, FIFA took its eye off the ball

executive to vote for South Africa ahead of Germany, England and Morocco, but, as we know, Oceania's Charlie Dempsey ducked out of the final vote and Germany nicked it.

That was a political defeat for Blatter, which he overcame nimbly by introducing a rotation system (now abandoned) to ensure that Africa landed its World Cup next time around. But the original German victory was a relief for FIFA staffers, who had little stomach for the complexities of an African World Cup so soon after the political circus of South Korea and Japan. Perhaps, over-confident in German organisational capacity, FIFA took its eye off the ball. Certainly, the world federation has not been as closely involved in the administration as it will be in 2010.

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Zero tolerance... German police train in anti-hooligan measures

General security is not expected to be a day-to-day issue of dispute once all the essential caveats about the impossibility of stopping a determined terrorist cell or suicide bomber have been taken on board.

One of the reasons FIFA has looked to boost its profits is to allow it to cope with the impossibility of obtaining tournament insurance in case of catastrophe.

The German government has given the European Union and European Commission due notice that it is reserving the right to suspend its open-border obligations under the Schengen Agreement. That will be effected any time it is considered appropriate before and during the finals to restrict the influx of known hooligans and other criminal elements.

Control of air space around and above the stadia during the finals is also in hand – just as long as the official FIFA flights are not affected, of course. Local organisers have long since sorted out the various refreshment contracts, and FIFA Marketing is almost as busy cracking down on merchandising pirates as it is in keeping the contracted clients happy.

A formal hospitality programme has also been put in place by Zurich-based company ISE, which will no doubt draw unfavourable publicity whenever the issue of ticketing rears its ugly head... which will be at regular intervals before and during the finals.

At the last count, ISE claimed to have sold 82 per cent of the hospitality packages, though whether early-match take-up will match sales is another matter: corporate clients, like many fans, buy packages for the later stages while staying away from the run-of-the-mill stuff.

Still, ISE expects to hit 100 per cent by the time Germany and Costa Rica kick off in Munich, which will keep 4,000 hostesses, 5,000 chefs and 12,000 waiters busy serving up 1.2 million bottles of beer, 600,000 soft drinks, 300,000 bottles of wine and

The German government is reserving the right to suspend its open-border obligations to restrict the influx of known hooligans and other criminal elements

50,000 bottles of champagne, plus food, using more than four million glasses and plates accompanied by more than seven million serviettes. And you thought the World Cup was about games and goals?

This brings us back to ticketing, the bane of any World Cup. Ticketing is divided into three separate areas of controversy – who runs the system, sales to foreign fans and the total available.

No set policy exists on control. FIFA oversaw the ticket distribution system in Korea and Japan and took all the flak when tickets were late being issued – failing to reach European fans before they flew out, for example – and then again from local organisers who spotted unsold seats (such as those with restricted views). Japanese and Korean officials united in using that issue as a convenient way of attacking what they considered to have been FIFA's control freakery.

Scotland's David Will, who holds the British vice-presidency on the FIFA executive, was the luckless fall guy for ticketing turbulence. The central problem was that the promised delivery technology did not match expectations and, when that horrible truth became clear, it was too late to do anything about it.

FIFA thus looked long and hard at ticketing for Germany and was delighted when the local organisers insisted on undertaking to handle the entire operation. They did so with a level of over-confidence that will haunt Beckenbauer up until July 9. He said: "The stadia will be ready, the

transport and accommodation will run smoothly, and the football will be terrific, but ticketing will be an issue right through to the Final itself."

To be fair, ticketing will always be a problem. The day there is no pressure on ticketing is the day Blatter's successor can pack his bags and find something else to do. World Cup ticketing is football's cultural revolution, a system of guaranteed perpetual upheaval.

Home advantage

One reason the Germans were so keen to "own" ticketing lay in the lessons of the European Championship in Belgium and Holland in 2000. The Germans saw then, to their horror, that European Union legislation prevented the hosts' fans enjoying any advantage in allocation over other citizens of the EU.

Clearly, this is a nonsense. The balance of the 3.1 million tickets should be tipped towards fans of the host nation: that must be one of the rewards for playing host in the first place, with all the incumbent logistical, cultural, social and financial upheaval.

Thus, the Germans created the clever notion of the "German football family" into which they channelled nine per cent (276,000) of the 2.2 million tickets available for general sale. This "football family" comprises individual members of regional associations, their leagues and clubs, and was a smart way of increasing domestic allocation at the expense of overseas fans.

How the Germans managed to obtain European Commission approval remains a secret; the anonymous negotiator clearly has a bright political future and should receive some sort of civil award for services to the German football supporter.

The remaining "family-reduced" tickets went on sale in various stages on the internet before and after the draw. The Germans had persuaded FIFA to let them introduce a "low price" ticket category for the first round, and that helped encourage a massive over-subscription.

The packages structure generally made good sense, particularly the team-specific package, through which a fan can follow his/her team until they are knocked out and then take up the remaining match options or cash them in.

Trouble is, by the time officials, media, VIPs, sponsors, hospitality clients and the "German football family" have all taken their cut, only eight per cent remain for

'The balance of the 3.1 million tickets should be tipped towards fans of the host nation'



The lion's share... World Cup mascot Goleo VI with a replica ticket

each competing nation in any given match. That said, 70 per cent of tickets go to fans of one sort or another, which is not as bad a picture as is often painted.

Also, sponsors, hospitality clients and media have all been warned that failure to take up reserved seats could mean cutbacks on their allocation in 2010.

One main area of controversy on to which FIFA has alighted is the re-allocation by fans of unwanted tickets. Initially, with an amazing ignorance of practical necessity, the organisers had made little provision for fans who bought tickets then wanted to share a "spare" ticket with a different fellow spectator from the one originally nominated. This is where the concept of named, ID-linked tickets falls down. FIFA has encouraged such a system ever since Italia 90. But as Blatter said, showing long-delayed enlightenment: "If every single fan must have his passport checked outside the stadium we will never get them into the ground in time for the kick-off."

Stadium officials at every one of the last four World Cups have assumed that a fan producing a bona fide ticket has a right to it by virtue of possession. If that assumption is not carried over to Germany, be prepared

Federations in some countries, such as Italy, have been engulfed by confusion over how to sell even the tickets initially allocated

for a huge outcry at the inevitable chaos when police and security personnel enforce the ID check to the letter of the law. That would exacerbate the usual howls of complaint about a shortage of tickets.

Some federations, such as those in England and Sweden, were quick off the mark to lobby for more tickets, with the English FA under critical pressure regarding criteria within its own allocation system; in contrast, federations in some other countries, such as Italy, have been engulfed by confusion over how to sell even the tickets initially allocated. So the worst-case scenario, terrorism aside, is a shortage of tickets exacerbated by tight security preventing fans who have got tickets from getting into grounds in time to use them.

Even more depressing is the knowledge that, as long as FIFA and the World Cup

'If every fan has his passport checked outside the stadium we'll never get them inside in time'

Sepp Blatter

remain financially interdependent, the basic system will not change whoever runs ticketing because the world authority needs to guarantee the income the finals will provide.

A flood of snide comments will flow, amid the stories of ticketing chaos, about the all-expenses, five-star lifestyle enjoyed by Blatter, his committee men and their support staff. But, to be fair, the bulk of FIFA's income is churned out again in development grants.

How those grants are allocated and to what use they are put is another subject for debate. It was intriguing to hear Blatter recently lecturing the Asian confederation on the need to step up its own development work (rather than continually come to FIFA for funds and knowhow).

But these are arguments for another day. Right now the best advice for the fortunate minority with World Cup match tickets is: Get there early!



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ANGOLA

Enjoy it while you can

The surprise debutants have severe limitations that suggest they might not be back at the finals for years



MARK GLEESON
IN JOHANNESBURG

ANGOLA HAVE declared that they hope their first World Cup appearance will be as much about promoting their formerly war-torn country as about achievements on the pitch.

They caused a major shock when pipping continental heavyweights Nigeria for a place at the finals but doubts about their ability to perform adequately on the world stage were increased by their poor showing at the African Nations Cup in January, when they exited at the group stage.

Decades of civil war have retarded football's development in the oil-rich country to such a degree that it has been mainly confined to the capital, Luanda, which is home to a massive refugee population from the provinces. But the potential for kids to play is limited by the daily grind of poverty. As a result, the national team have actively pursued players of Angolan origin from the diaspora to Europe, those from families who fled at the time of independence three decades ago or more recently from among refugees of the civil war.

The selection policy has produced a disparate team, but despite the players' vastly different backgrounds, they get on surprisingly well.

Playboy lifestyle

Angola have been top-heavy in competent forwards but players such as Akwa, Mantorras and Love have disappointed in recent months. Akwa was out of sorts at the Nations Cup, with many blaming his playboy lifestyle for his woeful showing, while Mantorras sulked on the bench after coach Luis Oliveira Goncalves opted not to play him in the starting line-up. The Benfica striker, who has not started a game for his club all season either, has since risked missing out on the World Cup by making a stinging criticism of the coach.

Midfield and defence are both problem areas, while a dearth of goalkeepers means the first-choice is likely to be veteran Joao Ricardo. He will possibly be the only player at the World Cup who did not have a club last season. He trained on his own as he tried in vain to secure a contract in Portugal.

Despite their woes over the decades, the Angolans remain a vibrant, outgoing people. With that approach they have been soaking up the World Cup atmosphere and revelling in a rare chance to rub shoulders with the world's footballing powers.

Results may not matter as much as absorbing the experience of the finals, not least because Angola are unlikely to be back for some time.

'The national team have actively pursued players of Angolan origin from the diaspora to Europe'



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ANGOLA

'All Angolans want to beat Portugal'

THE COACH: Luis Oliveira Goncalves



You have said all along that creating a good image of Angolan football would be your main objective at the World Cup, but surely you must have some hope of achieving good results in Germany?

Our first objective remains to uphold the dignity of Angola and of Africa. We are the first side to have made it to the World Cup after such tremendous civil strife and we must prove our potential. But we are not going to the World Cup just to play, obviously we also want to win. We are capable of good results and we do fancy our chances,

especially against Iran and Mexico. The game against Portugal is the big one, and for the people of Angola this is the one game we have to win. But we need to have realistic expectations.

Angola lost badly when they last played Portugal in November 2001 and there was a bevy of red cards as well as rioting by the fans. Is that going to have any influence on your meeting in Cologne on June 11?

No, there are good relations between our two federations and between me personally and [Portugal

coach] Scolari. If we did not have Portugal in the same group we would have had a lot of co-operation with them. We were going to play them in a friendly in March but we went to South Korea instead. But obviously all Angolans want to beat Portugal, we don't like losing to them.

In that 2001 game, the Angolan players seemed over-eager to make a point against their country's former colonial power.

We will work on that psychological aspect. Keeping the team stress-free is a big part of our planning. We want

to have the right attitude for all the games at the World Cup.

FIFA has said you are not allowed to use FC Porto defender Pedro Emanuel as you had hoped because he played for Portugal's Under-21s. Is that a big blow?

He would have been a big reinforcement because we are perhaps not as strong in midfield and defence as up front. But having said that, we have uncovered Rui Marques, who will be in our squad, and we also have experienced players such as Kali and Jamba.

SCHEDULE

MAY 19 Squad travel to Celle, near Hanover, for a training camp
MAY 27 Travel to Italy
MAY 30 Angola v Argentina (Naples)
 Travel back to Germany
JUNE 2 Angola v Saudi Arabia (Leverkusen)
 Travel to World Cup base – the Ringhotel Celler Tor in Celle

WORLD CUP GROUP D

JUNE 11 Angola v Portugal (Cologne)
JUNE 16 Angola v Mexico (Hanover)
JUNE 21 Angola v Iran (Leipzig)

'I have sacrificed a lot for the team'

THE PLAYER: Akwa

What are Angola's chances at the World Cup?

It's going to be very hard. We start against Portugal, who are a really tough team with a lot of experience. But you never know; we believe in possibilities.

What do the fans in Angola expect?

Well, they're expecting more from us than we achieved at the Nations Cup, so the pressure is really on. There is a belief among the people that we can just go there and win. They think it is easy. I don't think they

understand what it is to play at that level.

You don't have a club at present. How are you managing to prepare for the finals?

I have been training every day with the AS Aviação club. I hope that someone comes in for me because of the World Cup. Obviously, I'd like the chance to play in Europe again [Akwa was with Benfica].

What about the team's preparations?

Everything possible has been done to get us ready.

Also, the coach has told me that the facilities are excellent at our base in Germany.

Describe the emotion of qualifying for the World Cup.

It was the proudest moment of my life, an experience I will remember for ever. It was a very emotional occasion for me and for the country. I have sacrificed a lot for the national team; it cost me my career at Benfica, for instance, because I always had to travel back to play for the national side. So this will be the high point for me. It will be payback for the sacrifice.



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TACTICS

ANGOLA'S STRONGEST area used to be the left flank, where the overlapping of Yamba Asha and the guile of Gilberto carved open many a defence. However, Yamba Asha is now serving a nine-month ban for drugs use, while Gilberto is almost certain to miss the finals after snapping an Achilles tendon in January.

That forces Angola to change their gameplan, although the launching of swift attacks down the flanks is still very much part of their style. This pace is supplied by Edson on the left and Mendonca on the right.

Up front, Akwa is usually a reliable finisher, although he had a poor Nations Cup in this respect, and Angola had to rely on Flavio, his strike partner, instead. Akwa has great strength and speed but his confidence needs a boost after the Egypt finals.

Even so, the attack is a stronger department than central midfield, where veteran Figueiredo is all heart but often caught for pace, and Andre, though strong in the tackle, has poor distribution. Maurito is normally the replacement for Figueiredo, who usually lasts no longer than an hour. Maurito's arrival makes Angola more attacking but also more porous.

An inexperienced defence of Jamba, Jacinto, Kali and Marco Abreu sits uncertainly ahead of goalkeeper Joao Ricardo. Marco Abreu's left-back berth is under threat from Delgado. Newcomer Rui Marques may well see some action in defence. Lebo-Lebo is an alternative to Kali.

Set-pieces are the responsibility of Figueiredo and Akwa.

Luis Oliveira Goncalves

COACH 22.06.60



Took over in late 2003, supposedly as a stop-gap replacement for Ismael Kurtz, who was fired after Angola lost the first leg of their World Cup preliminary round tie against Chad. But Goncalves has made the job his own by transforming Angola's fortunes. Won the 2001 African Youth Championship with Angola's Under-20s.

Goliath

GOALKEEPER

01.10.72
Sagrada Esperanca
21 caps (0 goals)



Winner of the Angolan League last season with Sagrada Esperanca, the first provincial side to lift the trophy in almost 30 years. But Goliath is only back-up keeper in the national side and has played just twice in the past two years.

Joao Ricardo

GOALKEEPER

07.01.70
Unattached
22 caps (0 goals)



First-choice despite having been without a club since his contract with Portugal's Moreirense expired last year. Born in Angola but left with his family as a toddler and was brought up in Portugal, Angola's first opponents.

Lama

GOALKEEPER

01.01.81
Petro Atletico
9 caps (0 goals)



Won his first cap as a teenager, even when not yet first-choice at his club. Has emerged in recent months as No 2 with Angola, rising above Goliath in the pecking order despite having missed the Nations Cup finals in January because of injury.

Delgado

DEFENDER

01.11.79
Primeiro Agosto
13 caps (0 goals)



Stands a chance of taking the left-back berth left vacant following the drugs ban on Yamba Asha, but is up against Marco Abreu. Delgado's good club form since the start of the season has strengthened his case.

Jacinto

DEFENDER

10.12.74
AS Aviação
20 caps (0 goals)



Regular central defender whose place is now under threat after disappointing performances at the Nations Cup. Helped his club to win three consecutive League titles between 2002 and 2004.

Jamba

DEFENDER

10.07.77
AS Aviação
31 caps (0 goals)



Played in 27 successive internationals over the past three years following a gap of five years between his debut and his second appearance. Angola's Footballer of the Year for 2005.

Kali

DEFENDER

11.10.78
Barreirense (Por)
19 caps (0 goals)



Has bounced back into contention after serving a six-month drugs ban that kept him out of key World Cup qualifiers. Recently switched clubs in the Portuguese Second Division, joining Barreirense from Santa Clara. Born in Luanda but brought up in Portugal.

Lebo-Lebo

DEFENDER

29.05.77
Petro Atletico
13 caps (0 goals)



Scored the goal that brought provincial Sagrada Esperanca their first league title last September; now at Luanda-based Petro Atletico. Tall central defender who is a powerful force in the air.

Loco

DEFENDER

25.12.84
Primeiro Agosto
7 caps (0 goals)



A rising star of the team who made his debut as a teenager. Joined army club Primeiro Agosto from Benfica Luanda at the start of the year and has been enhancing his reputation as a fearsome tackler.

Marco Abreu

DEFENDER

08.12.74
Portimonense (Por)
2 caps (0 goals)



Has not been back to Angola since he was a toddler but was born in Lubango and offered a chance to play for the country as they searched for a left-back to replace the banned Yamba Asha ahead of the Nations Cup. Played in one game at the finals but then sustained an injury.

Rui Marques

DEFENDER

03.09.77
Hull (Eng)
1 cap (0 goals)



Born in Angola but raised in Portugal and showed little interest in Angola's approaches to appear for them while a rising star at Benfica and then Stuttgart. But his career stalled after a move to Leeds, who recently loaned him to Hull, and he has now agreed to come into the Angolan fold.

Andre

MIDFIELDER

14.05.78
Kuwait SC (KuW)
31 caps (0 goals)



Has a key role playing just in front of the defence. One of Angola's top exports in recent years, playing at Portuguese top division clubs Vitoria Guimaraes and Boavista, and in Turkey at Gaziantepspor. But he has not been as effective since moving to Kuwait last year.

Edson

MIDFIELDER

03.02.80
Pacos Ferreira (Por)
5 caps (0 goals)



Angola snapped up the midfielder as soon as he emerged in the Portuguese top division with Pacos Ferreira at the start of the season. Made his debut in a friendly against Japan in November and replaced the injured Gilberto on the left wing at the Nations Cup.

Figueiredo

MIDFIELDER

28.11.72
Varzim (Por)
20 caps (2 goals)



A hero in Angola after scoring the equaliser away to main rivals Nigeria in the qualifiers. The game finished 1-1 and the result was vital for Angola's progress to their first finals. Born in Angola to Portuguese parents, who left for their homeland at independence in 1975.

Freddy

MIDFIELDER

14.08.79
Moreirense (Por)
10 caps (1 goal)



Another of the large contingent of Angola-born players with Portuguese clubs. Began his career at Uniao Leiria but has now dropped down a division with Moreirense. His one goal for Angola was the winner at home to Rwanda in the World Cup qualifiers in September 2004.

Mendonca

MIDFIELDER

09.10.82
Varzim (Por)
32 caps (3 goals)



Played under coach Goncalves and with Gilberto and Mantorras in the Under-20 side that won the 2001 African Championship.

Miloy

MIDFIELDER

27.05.81
InterClube
10 caps (0 goals)



A regular squad member but has not seen too much action. Even so, he proved his worth with a fine display in the key World Cup qualifier away to Nigeria. Losing finalist in the 2001 African Cup-winners Cup with InterClube, the Luanda-based police team.

Ze Kalanga

MIDFIELDER

12.10.83
Petro Atletico
19 caps (2 goals)



Recently named the most promising newcomer in Angola, having done his candidacy no harm by providing the cross that led to Akwa's World Cup qualification-clinching goal against Rwanda in October. Strong-running and imposing, he could attract the attention of European clubs.

Akwa

FORWARD

30.05.77
Unattached
73 caps (32 goals)



Angola's captain has had no competitive football since February, when his contract with Qatari club Al Wakra was cancelled for disciplinary reasons. Despite this, he remains the national team's talisman and has record caps and goals tallies. Was a teenage prodigy at Benfica.

Also in contention

Goalkeeper **MARIO** (01.06.85; InterClube; 0 caps) has had a good season at club level.

Defender **MANUEL** (16.12.82; AS Aviação; 8 caps, 0 goals) played in a handful of the qualifiers but is still only on the fringes of the squad. Another defender, **MARCO AIROSA** (06.08.84; Barreirense, Por; 1 cap, 0 goals), won his first cap in the March friendly against South Korea. **JOEL** (13.02.76; AS Aviação; 0 caps) has been in good form for his club this season.

Midfielder **ZWELA** (03.08.83; Xanthi, Gre; 3 caps, 0 goals) has appeared only in friendlies for Angola but put in a fine performance against South Korea in March. Veteran winger **JOSE QUITONGO** (18.11.74; Partick Thistle, Sco; 0 caps) got a first call-up in April for the COSAFA Castle Cup. Left-sided **CHINHO** (04.02.82; Sagrada Esperanca; 12 caps, 1 goal) was in the running a few months ago but has suffered a dip in form. Experienced midfielder **STOPIRRA** (25.12.78; Primeiro Agosto; 28 caps, 1 goal) is likely to miss out after injury forced him to undergo an operation.

Forward **ANDRE "Titi" BUENGO** (11.02.80; Clermont Foot, Fra; 1 cap, 0 goals) made the Nations Cup squad but his international inexperience may count against him.

Flavio

FORWARD

30.12.79
Al Ahly (Egy)
45 caps (13 goals)



Poor form prompted jeers from Al Ahly fans in recent weeks, but he was Angola's best performer at the Nations Cup in January. Went to Egypt from Petro Atletico. Named best player in the 2001 African Champions League.

Love

FORWARD

14.03.79
AS Aviação
32 caps (4 goals)



Powerfully built striker who has been leading scorer in the Angolan League for the past two seasons, hitting 30 goals in all. Eyeing a move to Europe after the finals, and his club have promised they will allow him to leave.

Mantorras

FORWARD

18.03.82
Benfica (Por)
9 caps (3 goals)



Jeopardised his World Cup chances after criticising Goncalves for using him in just one out of three Nations Cup games. His career has been hit by injuries; he had been tipped to be one of the top strikers in Europe, prompting Benfica to tie him to a long deal when signing him from Alverca.

Maurito

FORWARD

24.06.81
Al Wahda (UAE)
15 caps (3 goals)



Likely to be used as an impact player off the bench, a role in which he proved effective at the Nations Cup in January. Scored on his debut against Morocco in 2004 and has proved a success in the UAE, moving recently from Al Jazira to Al Wahda.

ARGENTINA

Shock waves



ERIC WEIL
IN BUENOS AIRES

The surprise early exit last time is a major reason for the lowering of expectations

ARGENTINIAN FANS have still not got over the shock of the team's first round elimination at the last World Cup and, as ever, think their country has been drawn in a tough group this time. In fact, some even feel there is a conspiracy against Argentina because they have been drawn with Holland, the country they most wanted to avoid of those that could have been put in their group.

In this soccer-crazy country almost everyone feels they know better than the national coach, who is under continual pressure to put players from one club or another into the squad, with the names of the favoured candidates written on banners and displayed at League matches.

When Jose Pekerman first took charge in September 2004, everyone was happy that he made the team play with a more South American style than predecessor Marcelo Bielsa. But the mood was also no doubt helped because results were good. There have been few of those in recent months.

Argentina beat Brazil 3-1 in the World Cup qualifiers last June, but since then there has been little cause for optimism. Pekerman's men were

thumped 4-1 by the Brazilians in the Confederations Cup Final later that month, lost two World Cup qualifiers – against Paraguay and Uruguay (both 1-0) – and although they showed better form in two friendlies against England and Croatia, they lost both of them 3-2.

The fans also feel somewhat distant from the national team because it mainly comprises players with foreign clubs and so they rarely get to see them in the flesh.

Superior Brazil

There has been caution from within the Argentina camp about their chances in Germany. Whenever a player or official has talked in the media about Argentina winning the World Cup, they have not sounded as if they genuinely believe it is possible, and everybody agrees that Brazil are superior. That includes Pekerman, who has only gone as far as to say he has the semi-finals in his sights.

Meanwhile, questions

have been raised about preparations. While other countries have played regular games and made use of every international window, Argentina had only one match scheduled in the run-up to the World Cup, against Angola, hardly the toughest opponents.

Argentina have also suffered a crop of injuries, with Oscar Ustari, Roberto Ayala, Gabriel Heinze, Javier Mascherano, Pablo Aimar, Maximiliano Rodríguez and Lionel Messi all sidelined. Even if they are fit in time, there are doubts about whether they can find their form.

Apart from whether the injured players make it, the debate about selection has centred on whether to take in-form players or bank on experience. Pekerman seems to favour the latter option.

Yet there is a silver lining to all this gloom.

Since the general mood is not optimistic, expectations are, for once, not high.

This should mean the players will feel less pressure, which, in theory, should help them do better than last time.

'Players talk about winning the World Cup but do not sound as if they genuinely believe it is possible'



False dawn...Hernan Crespo (left) gives Argentina the lead against England in a World Cup warm-up in Geneva but they ended up losing 3-2

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ARGENTINA

'Brazil aren't certain to win. We beat them not so long ago'

THE COACH: Jose Pekerman

Are Brazil currently better than Argentina?

Brazil are a little step above us. I like to be realistic. Brazil are the World Cup holders and have maintained their high level because they have great players and good back-ups. We also have talented players, who are wanted all over the world. It is just that Brazil seem to win matches with less effort, while we have to play a more elaborate game. Our players are not as effective near goal as the Brazilians, but nevertheless we have a very

competitive team. That said, it is time we won something – Argentina have not won a major title since the 1993 Copa America.

What are the strengths and weaknesses of your side?

In most matches we have had periods of good passing play and organisation. And even when we have changed our forward line we have still created good scoring opportunities. But we have conceded more goals than we should have done, and defensive lapses have

sometimes caused us to lose or at least put our lead under threat. It's bad luck that we have had so many injuries so close to the World Cup, but I am confident these players will be fit in time.

Who will win the World Cup?

Although the world thinks Brazil are the No 1 candidates, I don't think they are assured of the title. After all, we beat them not so long ago.

What about Argentina?

We have to go match by match. We cannot think about

playing in the Final against Brazil or anyone else for that matter before getting through all the rounds. Today, you cannot win games just by wearing a famous shirt. And certainly, the fans cannot expect us to win easily and playing good football. We are in the middle of a generation change. People think we can win the World Cup with [Lionel] Messi, but I don't want him as a saviour. There are no more World Cups to be won only with individual skills.

Interview by Eric Weil

SCHEDULE

MAY 30 Argentina v Angola (Naples). Squad will then travel to World Cup base – the Herzogspark hotel in Herzogenaurach, near Nuremberg

WORLD CUP GROUP C

JUNE 10 Argentina v Ivory Coast (Hamburg)
JUNE 16 Argentina v Serbia & Montenegro (Gelsenkirchen)
JUNE 21 Argentina v Holland (Frankfurt)

'I was swearing like hell when I first saw the finals draw'

THE PLAYER: Hernan Crespo

Do you feel the draw was unfair to Argentina?

Honestly, I was swearing like hell when I first saw who else was in our group. But after a while, I started to say to myself that we are as strong as they are, or even stronger, because we have more experience. They all have to respect us in the same way we will respect them.

Which of the three are the biggest danger?

Maybe Holland appear more dangerous because of their tradition and because they sent us home from France in 1998, but that is something the press and the supporters think about more than the players.

What are Argentina's strengths and weaknesses?

I don't think we can play in the finals as we did in the qualifiers. In South America it's easier to attack all the time, even when you are winning. At the World Cup we will have to be more adaptable, depending on the situation. That was one of our biggest mistakes in 2002. Everyone knew how we were going to play. This time has to be different, we have to keep some tactical tricks up our sleeves so we can spring a few surprises.

Argentina seem to have more experience than Holland. Will this work to your advantage?

Our advantage could be that we have players who are still relatively young but also have a lot of experience. Maybe Holland don't have that, but it can also work in



the opposite way. Sometimes young players have more fun and don't feel pressure.

What are the differences between your club coach, Jose Mourinho, and your national coach?

Well, Mourinho changes

the style according to our opponents, whereas Pekerman always wants Argentina to play in accordance with our tradition – which means we should attack all the time.

Are Brazil your favourites to win the tournament?

Yes, Brazil are always the No 1 candidates to win the World Cup because they have two top-class players for every position. They can change the names but will always play the same and get positive results.

Interview by Andres Garavaglia & Dan Brennan

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ARGENTINA



TACTICS

JOSE PEKERMÁN has tried out many formations in recent internationals, including 3-4-1-2 and 3-2-2-1-2, but seems to prefer a 4-3-1-2 set-up.

In the latter, the likely line-up is Roberto Abbondanzieri in goal; a defence of Javier Zanetti, Roberto Ayala, Walter Samuel and Juan Pablo Sorin; Martin Demichelis, Esteban Cambiasso and Luis Gonzalez in midfield, with Juan Roman Riquelme in the playmaker role; and a front line comprising Lionel Messi and Hernan Crespo. Defender Gabriel Heinze will be a strong contender for a first-team place if he recovers from his long injury lay-off, while forward Carlos Tevez is likely to see plenty of action as a substitute in Germany, if he is not in fact in the starting line-up.

Pekerman has also played with two linkmen in midfield – Riquelme and Javier Mascherano or Cambiasso – and if playing a three-men defence, Sorin moves up to midfield, from where he often goes on dangerous attacking runs and has scored some good goals.

Whatever the formation, most of the play goes through Riquelme.

Crespo is essentially a penalty box operator. Messi and Tevez are both good at beating their markers and tend to move all over the front line as well as dropping deeper to take possession.

Jose Pekerman

COACH 03.09.49

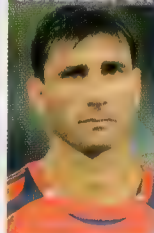


Took the reins in September 2004 having turned the position down in 1998 saying he was not experienced enough. Had a highly successful spell in charge of Argentina's youth teams, winning three World Youth Cups. A midfielder with Argentinos Juniors in his playing days. Went on to coach the club's youth team, and also led the young stars at Colo Colo in Chile.

Roberto Abbondanzieri

GOALKEEPER

19.08.72
Boca Juniors
19 caps (0 goals)



Outstanding for Boca in recent years but not as convincing for the national team. Weak when dealing with high crosses and sometimes caught out of position. But on his day he is a commanding presence with an impressively long kick.

German Lux

GOALKEEPER

07.06.82
River Plate
4 caps (0 goals)



Good alternative to Abbondanzieri and a safer pair of hands, but has little senior international experience. Part of the Olympic gold-winning team in 2004.

Oscar Ustari

GOALKEEPER

03.07.86
Independiente
0 caps



Arguably the best keeper in the domestic League, but has no senior international experience. Has good technique and is often the saviour for Independiente's less-than-solid defence.

Roberto Ayala

DEFENDER

14.04.73
Valencia (Spa)
102 caps (6 goals)



Has his best years behind him but this veteran of two World Cups is still Argentina's top centre-back. A stopper who is good in the air and a fine organiser. Sidelined by a cartilage injury for two months earlier this year. Olympic champion in 2004.

Nicolas Burdisso

DEFENDER

12.04.81
Internazionale (Ita)
7 caps (0 goals)



Useful reserve for several defensive positions, especially left-back. World Youth Cup winner in 2001.

Fabrizio Coloccini

DEFENDER

22.01.82
Deportivo La Coruna (Spa)
19 caps (0 goals)



The alternative to Ayala as stopper. Quick and good in the air but not the best tackler and has a tendency to give away unnecessary free-kicks. World Youth Cup winner in 2001 and Olympic gold medallist three years later.

Gabriel Heinze

DEFENDER

19.04.78
Manchester United (Eng)
24 caps (1 goal)



Left-back or centre-back with plenty of fighting spirit, good passing ability and a strong shot. Suffered a cruciate ligament injury last September and returned to training only in March, putting his finals place in doubt.

Gabriel Milito

DEFENDER

07.09.80
Zaragoza (Spa)
10 caps (0 goals)



Likely to be a reserve for central defence or full-back positions and has always played well when called upon. Some observers argue that he is actually better than Samuel.

Walter Samuel

DEFENDER

22.03.78
Internazionale (Ita)
54 caps (4 goals)



Refound his form after joining Inter from Real Madrid and is the regular central defensive partner for Ayala. Reliable, a good marker and has a good understanding with his team-mates.

Juan Pablo Sorin

DEFENDER

05.05.76
Villarreal (Spa)
67 caps (9 goals)



Captain and an outstanding, energetic full-back or wing-back who offers pace, a hard shot and is also good in the air. The downside is that he can get over-enthusiastic and lose control.

Javier Zanetti

DEFENDER

10.08.73
Internazionale (Ita)
90 caps (5 goals)



Seasoned right-back or right midfielder with two World Cups behind him and many years in Serie A. His precise passes often get attacks going; not so good at ball-winning. In very good condition for his age.

Pablo Aimar

MIDFIELDER

03.11.79
Valencia (Spa)
39 caps (5 goals)



Injury-afflicted attacking midfielder or playmaker who has shone only in flashes when given a starting role by Argentina. Pekerman once compared him to Ronaldinho, but he's a long way from that sort of form. Struck down with meningitis recently but should be OK for the finals.

Esteban Cambiasso

MIDFIELDER

18.08.80
Internazionale (Ita)
17 caps (1 goal)



Central midfielder with good ball control and distribution skills and an eye for shooting chances. Fits perfectly into Pekerman's playing scheme, in which he is a key man.

Martin Demichelis

MIDFIELDER

20.12.80
Bayern Munich (Ger)
3 caps (0 goals)



Defensive midfielder who's adept at breaking up attacks. Can also play in defence. Highly valued by Bayern for his stamina, which allows him to cover a lot of ground and snuff out danger.

Luis Gonzalez

MIDFIELDER

19.01.81
FC Porto (Por)
25 caps (3 goals)



Intelligent, neat attacking midfielder with the knack of creating space for himself. His recent international performances were below standard, however, suggesting fatigue.

Javier Mascherano

MIDFIELDER

08.06.84
Corinthians (Bra)
12 caps (0 goals)



A good playmaker and a ready replacement for Riquelme, although they also combine well when both start. Offers good distribution and tackling. Returned to action only in March after a lengthy injury lay-off.

Juan Roman Riquelme

MIDFIELDER

24.06.78
Villarreal (Spa)
28 caps (8 goals)



Playmaker since Pekerman took charge, and the team revolves around him. Lacks pace but is a superb passer and dangerous from free-kicks. Can disappear from games on occasion – bad news for Argentina when he does.

Maximiliano Rodriguez

MIDFIELDER

02.01.81
Atletico Madrid (Spa)
10 caps (1 goal)



Steady player who marks and passes well and provides cover for any midfield position, although best on the right. A favourite of Pekerman because of his strong will and willingness to follow instructions to the letter.

Hernan Crespo

FORWARD

05.07.75
Chelsea (Eng)
56 caps (28 goals)



The team's leading scorer is reliant on accurate service in the box since he is not great at beating his marker. Went to the last two World Cups but was overshadowed by the now retired Gabriel Batistuta. Now it's Crespo's chance to shine.

Lionel Messi

FORWARD

24.06.87
Barcelona (Spa)
6 caps (1 goal)



Has superb ball control, great pace and a good shot near goal. The comparisons to Diego Maradona are justified. A leg injury will keep him sidelined until shortly before the finals.

Diego Milito

FORWARD

12.06.79
Zaragoza (Spa)
6 caps (2 goals)



The likely replacement for Crespo since they have a similar physique and eye for goal. Has not shone for Argentina in his few appearances, but gets his chance in the squad because of his regular goals in the Spanish League.

Javier Saviola

FORWARD

11.12.81
Sevilla (Spa)
27 caps (9 goals)



Scorer and creator of goals but his small frame means he finds it hard going against physical defenders. Used to be an Argentina regular but lost his place because of a lack of first-team action at club level.

Carlos Tevez

FORWARD

05.02.84
Corinthians (Bra)
18 caps (3 goals)



Outstanding dribbler, and his stocky build allows him to take the many knocks that come his way. Also a prolific scorer with a good shot. Difficult to mark since he often drops deep. Like Messi, he has been likened to Maradona, and not without reason.

Also in contention

LEO FRANCO (20.05.77; Atletico Madrid, Spa; 3 caps, 0 goals) is the likeliest replacement if any of the three probables for the goalkeeping squad places are injured.

SEBASTIAN BATTAGLIA (08.11.80; Boca Juniors; 6 caps, 0 goals) is an experienced midfielder, while striker club-mate **RODRIGO PALACIO** (05.02.82; Boca Juniors; 1 cap, 0 goals) has stood out in the Argentinian League.

Forward **LUCAS CASTROMAN** (02.10.80; Velez Sarsfield; 5 caps, 0 goals) is the leading player of a leading team.

CRISTIAN "Kily" GONZALEZ (04.08.74; Internazionale, Ita; 54 caps, 9 goals) is a highly experienced forward, renowned for his dangerous runs up the wing. Fellow forward and Inter team-mate **JULIO CRUZ** (10.10.74; Internazionale, Ita; 10 caps, 0 goals) has always tended to show better for his club sides than for the national team.

Former national team star **ARIEL ORTEGA** (04.03.74; Newell's Old Boys; 84 caps, 17 goals) has refound his form at Newell's and is almost back to his best. There is media and fan pressure for him to be picked for what would be a fourth World Cup, but his age, 32, is against him.

The two youngest fringe candidates – playmaker **FERNANDO GAGO** (10.04.86; Boca Juniors; 0 caps) and forward **SERGIO AGUERO** (02.06.88; Independiente; 0 caps) – have also been the outstanding players of the domestic season. As with Ortega, there is external pressure to include them, but clearly they lack experience.

AUSTRALIA

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STEVE DETTRE
IN SYDNEY

Socceroos fans don't expect to win the trophy but they won't accept defeat without a fight

WHEN JOHN ALOISI'S penalty smacked into the back of the Uruguayan net last November it engendered a sense of achievement right across Australia.

The word "destiny" had been bandied around for months, with many believing that just getting to Germany was the target. But since then the reality has set in that anything less than a full-blooded effort at the finals could cause a major setback for soccer in Australia.

Sports fans will follow the fortunes of any Australian national team. But if the public feel the team has let the country down, then they – and the media – can turn ugly.

Critically, just as soccer has been reaching new standards domestically with the revamped national championship, the A-League, there is an expectation that the Socceroos will leave Germany with their heads held high. No one expects them to come home with the trophy. All they want are goals – something the fabled 1974 team failed to achieve – a win, and hopefully a place in the second round.

The shoot-out win against Uruguay triggered scenes of joy across Australia. Football madness has swept the country since, with the airing of TV

programmes such as *Song For The Socceroos* to find a World Cup anthem. Youth-level player registrations have risen and the A-League drew record crowds and delivered some good quality matches. But the Socceroos must fight to the last at the finals to satiate the demands of the Green and Gold Army, the vociferous supporters who will be out in force in Germany.

Mix of styles

Australia do not even pretend that they play pretty football, but the mix of British, Continental and South American styles, with a twist of tough Aussie edge, can be effective. The current team can, in fact, play some sweet football, and showed they had enough stomach for a fight against Uruguay.

There is also the belief that the Socceroos have a trump card in coach Guus Hiddink. The team often used a direct approach in the past, but the Dutchman has shown there are other options in attack. With Aloisi, Harry Kewell, Mark Viduka and rising stars Tim Cahill and Jason Culina, the team will look to develop an attack based around more

than athletic intensity. Australia have often had an abundance of solid defenders in the past, but the back line has proved to be a weak link in recent years. Witness the 10 goals leaked during last year's Confederations Cup. Hiddink has shown he is aware of the problem, mixing up the team in the play-off by using midfielder Scott Chipperfield in defence, and pushing right-back Lucas Neill into midfield.

The Socceroos' best chance of a win would seem to be in the opening game against Japan. One can only expect defeat against Brazil in the second game; we just hope it's not the 6-0 shellacking of the 1997 Confederations Cup Final. Against Croatia in the final group game, Australia could field several players with family roots in that country and face three Croatians of Australian background. This match is almost certain to decide the Socceroos' fate, and it could be one of the great showdowns in Australian sporting history.

Realistically, the chances of making the second phase don't look good. But there have been glimpses of what can happen when the stars click, and that's what the fans are hoping for.

'There is a belief that the Socceroos have a trump card in Guus Hiddink'



Socceroo beauty...Uruguay keeper Fabian Carini is left helpless as Marco Bresciano scores in Sydney to take the play-off into a penalty shoot-out

'Our goal is the next round. Why not?'

THE COACH: Guus Hiddink



What were your first impressions of the Australia side when you took over?

One thing was very clear to

me when I watched DVDs of Australia's matches at last year's Confederations Cup. They were a little bit old-fashioned – with a lot of defence-orientated players gathered together, forming a block around 20-25 metres from the box, and then up front just a couple of cowboys. That was the style even when they played against a team with one striker. I had to change that. I needed them to use the space on the pitch.

How did you go about changing things?

We practised – a lot. The players were very open to making changes. At the beginning they were a bit anxious out on the pitch, they were used to having their buddies just a few yards away. But modern football is a bit different, so at first there was

a lot of confusion. Against Argentina, they were outplayed even though they had five or six at the back and the Argentinians had only two or three players up front.

How did you persuade them to open up on the pitch?

We had training sessions for a whole week before a friendly against Jamaica and we tried to transfer everything we'd worked on into the game. All of a sudden – whoosh! [Australia won 5-0] In a proper game it had started working like it did in training. So that's how they gained confidence, playing another way. Because although they had been very defence-orientated in the Confederations Cup it hadn't done them any good because they had conceded more than 10 goals. And they had the capacity to score themselves,

SCHEDULE

MAY 25 Australia v Greece (Melbourne)
MAY 25 Squad travel to training camp in Mierlo, Holland
JUNE 4 Australia v Holland (Rotterdam)
JUNE 5 Travel to training camp at Oehringen, Germany
JUNE 8 Australia v Liechtenstein (Ulm, Germany)
JUNE 9 Travel to World Cup base – the Wald & Schlosshotel in Friedrichsruhe, 50km north-east of Stuttgart

WORLD CUP GROUP F

JUNE 12 Australia v Japan (Kaiserslautern)
JUNE 18 Australia v Brazil (Munich)
JUNE 22 Australia v Croatia (Stuttgart)

with players like Viduka and so on. But if you concede a lot of goals then the one or two goals you score are not much use!

How did the players react to reaching the finals?

Of course, after we beat Uruguay the players were so happy, and I was delighted for them – and for me as well! – because it seemed like a miracle for them to get into the finals for the first time for 32 years. European and South American players get the chance to play in a big tournament every two years. But these Australian players could have finished their

careers without ever playing in a major tournament.

What do you expect to achieve in Germany?

For some teams, getting to the finals is the achievement. Of course, we're only 54th in the FIFA rankings, but I've said to the players: "Come on, guys – our goal is the second round!" Why not? In our group we have Japan and Croatia. Brazil are different, of course. But the Croatia game is special because of the links many of our players have with that country. I'm confident we can reach the second round.

Interview by Keir Radnedge

'The World Cup will realise they have been missing us'

THE PLAYER: John Aloisi

Your penalty took Australia to the World Cup for the first time in 32 years. How did it feel to take it?

I was more excited than nervous. I picked the ball up, put it on the spot, and I knew that was it. When our assistant coach asked who was going to take the penalties, I put my hand up straight away. He said: "Do you want to take the first?" And I said: "No, the fifth." I wanted to win the game.

What does it mean to Australia to be at their first World Cup for 32 years?

It was massive news. Everywhere we went people

stopped us and asked for photos or autographs, they were saying things like: "You made us cry, that was the first time I cried at a sporting event." There were cameras everywhere, and that just doesn't happen for soccer.

Football is not exactly Australia's biggest sport.

No, and yet the next day on TV everyone was talking about it as one of the greatest sporting moments in Australian history, comparing it to something like Cathy Freeman [the 2000 Olympics 400 metres champion]. She was the best runner in the world, and I'm nowhere near

the best footballer in the world, so if people can even put me in the same sentence as her, wow! But it doesn't matter whether Aussies like football or not, they still want their country to do well.



Are you expecting many fans to travel to the World Cup?

We'll probably have more support than anyone except the English and the Germans. We're very visible, very vocal, and I think the World Cup will realise that they have been missing us.

What difference has Guus Hiddink made to the side?

He brings international experience. He likes the Australian mentality, and his confidence rubbed off on us: against Uruguay he was never nervous – or never showed it, anyway – and that showed with us, especially during the penalties.

What is Australia's aim at the World Cup?

The main objective is to get through the first round, and I think that's realistic. Then you never know what can happen.

What about the game against Croatia?

It's going to be huge for Sydney, with its big Croatian community. And we've got six or seven players with Croatian roots, so we've got insider info on them! I don't think they're the team they used to be in the 1990s. We're confident that we can surprise a few people this summer.

Interview by Sid Lowe



TACTICS

WITH GUUS HIDDINK at the helm, Australia's tactics are as much about what happens off the field as what happens on it. His mind games, his ability to keep the opposition guessing – and at times his own team – are what could give the Aussies an edge at the finals.

On the field, it's the same: keep them guessing. Shortly after he took control of the Socceroos and they beat Jamaica 5-0, Hiddink said: "We must not stick to one system all the time because then you get vulnerable. You have to be flexible. We have to show variation in the system."

That said, it's hard to see the coach changing much about the line-up from the team that qualified in Sydney: goalkeeper – Mark Schwarzer; defence – Tony Popovic, Scott Chipperfield, Tony Vidmar; midfield – Brett Emerton, Tim Cahill, Lucas Neill, Vince Grella, Marco Bresciano; front line – Mark Viduka, Harry Kewell.

Hiddink used both Chipperfield (a midfielder) and Neill (a defender) out of position in that game, but it worked. He also left Kewell on the bench for the first 30 torrid minutes as Uruguay battered the Aussies in search of a goal. Then, in a masterstroke, he brought him on, and Kewell was involved in the move that led to Australia's goal, which took the tie to penalties.

But while the 3-5-2 line-up has been shown to work, a 4-4-2 is more likely to be employed, with Neill moving back to defence.

Guus Hiddink

COACH 08.11.46
Handed the reins last July and introduced a more continental approach, requiring more mobility and flexibility from the players. A national hero in South Korea after leading them to the World Cup semi-finals in 2002, also led Holland to the semis in 1998. Has won six Dutch League titles in two spells with PSV. Will coach Russia after the finals.

Zeljko Kalac

GOALKEEPER 16.12.72
Milan (Ita)
50 caps (0 goals)

Towering, athletic keeper whose gangling limbs give him considerable reach and have earned him the nickname Spider. First played in Europe with Dutch side Roda JC, then joined Perugia in Italy. Signed for Milan last year.

Mark Schwarzer

GOALKEEPER 06.10.72
Middlesbrough (Eng)
36 caps (0 goals)

Commanding presence and a good shot-stopper renowned for his consistency. Schwarzer's penalty shoot-out saves against Uruguay secured Australia's World Cup qualification and his place in the country's football folklore. One of the best keepers in the Premier League.

Stan Lazaridis

DEFENDER 16.08.72
Birmingham (Eng)
57 caps (0 goals)

A fan favourite because his speed and control make him exciting to watch and he has built a reputation for beating defenders with his tormenting left-flank runs. Once he gets to the byline he often delivers pinpoint crosses.

Jon McKain

DEFENDER 21.09.82
Poli Timisoara (Rom)
11 caps (0 goals)

Sturdy, tenacious defender who is strong in the air and a tight marker. Also capable of pushing up into midfield. Moved to Romania in 2003 to further his career and it paid off, winning a national team call-up the following year.

Ljubo Milicevic

DEFENDER 13.02.81
Thun (Swi)
5 caps (0 goals)

Big, strong, skilful defender whose ball control and ability to read the play have made him a central figure in Thun's defence. His career was hampered by three separate serious leg injuries, but he has returned to fitness. One of five in the squad with Croatian heritage.

Craig Moore

DEFENDER 12.12.75
Newcastle (Eng)
30 caps (2 goals)

Tough-tackling, uncompromising defender who is cool under pressure and a commanding presence. Spent 12 years at Rangers, then had six months at Borussia Monchengladbach before a move to Newcastle last year.

Lucas Neill

DEFENDER 09.03.78
Blackburn (Eng)
22 caps (0 goals)

A strong tackler, good in the air and able to link well going forward. His versatility allows him to play anywhere across the back line and even in midfield. Left Australia at 17 and spent six years with Millwall. Currently in the English top flight at Blackburn, along with Brett Emerton.

Tony Popovic

DEFENDER 04.07.73
Crystal Palace (Eng)
54 caps (7 goals)

Experienced, composed defender, equally at home as a stopper or sweeper. Also offers good distribution and provides strong aerial defence at set-pieces. Played for Japan's Sanfrecce Hiroshima before joining Crystal Palace. Another of the Croat-roots contingent.

Tony Vidmar

DEFENDER 04.07.70
NAC Breda (Hol)
75 caps (3 goals)

Veteran capable of playing anywhere along the back line. Generally plays on the left side, from where his forward runs provide support for the attack.

Marco Bresciano

MIDFIELDER 11.02.80
Parma (Ita)
22 caps (7 goals)

Strong midfielder with good pace and stamina who can play centrally or out wide. Also has an exquisite touch, is a dead-ball specialist and gets a good many goals. Moved to Parma from Empoli in summer 2002.

Alex Brosque

MIDFIELDER 12.10.83
Queensland Roar
3 caps (0 goals)

Left-sided attack-minded player who can be used in midfield or up front. Made his Australia debut in 2004 and his deft touch and skilful left foot have made him a promising addition to the squad. Has Uruguayan roots and was sounded out about playing for that country's national side.

Tim Cahill

MIDFIELDER 06.12.79
Everton (Eng)
14 caps (8 goals)

Attacking midfielder whose agility and vision allow him to find good scoring positions. Also a threat in the air. Finished top scorer at Everton last term, his first at the club, and was named the club's Player of the Season. Spent the previous eight years at Millwall, whom he joined at 16.

Scott Chipperfield

MIDFIELDER 30.12.75
Basle (Swi)
44 caps (11 goals)

Attacking left-sided midfielder with good stamina and pace and adept at getting past defenders. But can also play in central defence. Twice named Player of the Year in Australia's former National Soccer League. Used to supplement his income driving buses before heading to Europe.

Jason Culina

MIDFIELDER 05.08.80
PSV Eindhoven (Hol)
11 caps (1 goal)

Attacking midfielder with an eye for goal and whose forward runs and deft skills are a threat to any defence and capable of turning matches. Came into his own at Twente. Enschede after five years of obscurity at Ajax. Signed for PSV in the winter. Another with Croatian roots.

Ahmad Elrich

MIDFIELDER 30.05.81
Fulham (Eng)
16 caps (5 goals)

Attacking wide midfielder whose great first touch and speed allow him to regularly beat defenders. Became the first Australian to play in the Korean League, with Busan. Now at Fulham, and his crossing and awareness have improved since entering the Premier League.

Brett Emerton

MIDFIELDER 22.02.79
Blackburn (Eng)
45 caps (11 goals)

Clever winger with an abundance of speed, ball control and creativity. First played in Europe for Feyenoord, with whom he won the 2002 UEFA Cup. Joined Blackburn in 2003 and formed a strong combination with Lucas Neill.

Vince Grella

MIDFIELDER 05.10.79
Parma (Ita)
15 caps (0 goals)

Hard-working midfielder adept at closing down the opposition and tidying up loose balls and stray passes. First played in Europe for Ternana and Empoli before joining friend Marco Bresciano at Parma.

Harry Kewell

MIDFIELDER 22.09.78
Liverpool (Eng)
19 caps (6 goals)

Dazzling attacking midfielder with one of the best left feet in the game, and his flying runs cause headaches for defenders. His playing time has been limited by a persistent ankle injury over the past few seasons. But many still consider him the best player Australia has produced.

Josip Skoko

MIDFIELDER 10.12.75
Wigan (Eng)
44 caps (8 goals)

Quiet but effective midfielder whose deft touch and precision passing can turn a match. Also has brilliant close control. Became the first Australian to captain a foreign club, Genk of Belgium. His Croatian roots mean he is likely to be a key figure in the final group match.

Luke Wilshire

MIDFIELDER 02.10.81
Bristol City (Eng)
7 caps (0 goals)

Tenacious, hard-working midfielder who also has good distribution skills and is always willing to get forward to support the attack. Joined Middlesbrough at 17; now a first-team regular with Bristol City in England's third tier.

John Aloisi

FORWARD 05.02.76
Alaves (Spa)
39 caps (22 goals)

His height, power and timing make him a big threat inside the box. Also adept at holding up the ball and creating chances for team-mates. Scored the decisive penalty in the play-off shoot-out against Uruguay. Has played in England, Italy and now Spain.

Archie Thompson

FORWARD 23.10.78
PSV Eindhoven (Hol)
17 caps (21 goals)

New Zealand-born striker with an abundance of pace and excellent ball control who is always willing to take on defenders. Scored 13 goals in a World Cup qualifier against American Samoa in 2001, an international record. Has been on loan at PSV from Melbourne Victory.

Mark Viduka

FORWARD 09.10.75
Middlesbrough (Eng)
31 caps (6 goals)

Powerful striker and likely captain whose balance, close touch and aerial ability make him a real handful. Named Scottish Player of the Year in 2000 when at Celtic and also found success at Leeds. His Croatian roots and stint in the Croatian League will add drama to the last group match.

Also in contention

MICHAEL PETROVIC (16.07.76; Sivasspor, Tur; 4 caps, 0 goals) is good in the air and a commanding shot-stopper who is in the frame to take the third keeper spot.

There are a number of candidates for defensive berths. **JADE NORTH** (07.01.82; Newcastle Jets; 12 caps, 0 goals) is a tough competitor most at home on the right but capable of slotting in anywhere in the back line; **PATRICK KISNORBO** (24.03.81; Leicester, Eng; 7 caps, 0 goals) offers mobility, pace and strong tackling; central defender **STEPHEN LAYBUTT** (03.09.77; Gent, Blg; 15 caps, 1 goal) is renowned for his determined, abrasive style; right-back **KEVIN MUSCAT** (07.08.73; Melbourne Victory; 45 caps, 10 goals) is a gutsy performer with strong leadership skills; and **MICHAEL THWAITE** (02.05.83; National Bucharest, Rom; 2 caps, 0 goals) can play in central defence or at right-back.

SIMON COLOSIMO (08.01.79; Perth Glory; 23 caps, 3 goals) is a graceful central midfielder whose passing skills also allow him to play as a sweeper.

There are three main contenders up front: the pacy **MILE STERJOVSKI** (27.05.79; Basle, Swi; 19 caps, 3 goals), who offers great accuracy in front of goal; the hard-working, unselfish **DAVID ZDRILIC** (13.04.74; Sydney FC; 30 caps, 20 goals); and **MAX VIERI** (01.09.78; Arezzo, Ita; 6 caps, 0 goals), the quick, aggressive and technically sound younger brother of Italy's Christian Vieri.

BRAZIL

Final frontier

Despite a troubled year, the *Selecao* look set to go all the way again



BRIAN HOMEWOOD
IN RIO DE JANEIRO



Time to samba...Kaka and Robinho look forward to a sixth triumph for Brazil

IF THE WORLD CUP had been held a year ago, Brazil would have walked away with the title. Adriano was at his best, Robinho was uninhibited and untainted by a move to Real Madrid, and Dida was solid in goal. Since then, things have gone worryingly downhill.

Several players have had unhappy seasons in Europe, variously suffering from loss of form, injury, lack of affection from their club's fans or a combination of all three. Dida has made some howlers for Milan; Cafu, who will be 36 two days before the tournament begins, is returning from knee surgery; strikers Adriano and Ronaldo both seem to have lost their enjoyment for the game; and Roberto Carlos has been almost embarrassing at Madrid.

Meanwhile, Brazil's preparation as a team has been very poor. Since beating Chile 5-0 last September to qualify, they have played only one serious game, the final qualifier at home to Venezuela the following month. Of their other games, one was against a club side, Sevilla, two were in farcical conditions – away to Bolivia at 12,600 feet above sea level and away to Russia in a temperature of -15°C – and the other was an 8-0 stroll against the United Arab Emirates. The *Selecao*'s only match before the World Cup is a friendly against New Zealand in Geneva.

Hot favourites

Brazil remain hot favourites for a sixth title and, certainly, public opinion back home will not tolerate anything other than the *Hexa*. In fact, large sections of the media and most of the population regard it as a certainty.

In the past, Brazil have tended to flop in such circumstances, seemingly performing better when the odds were stacked against them, as in 1970 and 2002. But rather than talking down the team's status as favourites, coach Carlos Alberto Parreira sees it as a chance to achieve something new by starting as favourites and actually winning.

Parreira shrugs off his players' recent troubles. He insists Ronaldo is a big-occasion player and Cafu's spell on the sidelines will mean he arrives fresh in Germany rather than jaded. The one player causing him concern is Ronaldinho, who has been playing virtually twice a week since August.

Brazil should get away with their lack of meaningful matches because Parreira decided on his line-up long ago and the same players have been together for nearly three years. If necessary, he can always bring in central defender Cris and midfielder Juninho Pernambucano, both of whom have been excellent at Lyon.

The draw, which pits Brazil against Croatia, Australia and Japan, has also been kind, giving Parreira plenty of chances to see who is not up to the job before the serious stuff begins in the second round.

Even if the odd player is off form and the defence slips up occasionally, it is still hard to see Brazil not reaching the Final, where maybe Argentina will be waiting to avenge last year's Confederations Cup humiliation.

'Ronaldinho is a concern because he has been playing virtually twice a week since August'

'Germany are bigger favourites than us'

THE COACH: Carlos Alberto Parreira



This is an exceptional group of players. You must be very confident of success.

People have been calling

Real Madrid the galacticos, yet what have they won? Having exceptional players doesn't necessarily guarantee success. Talent is not enough at a World Cup. We have to have emotion and play with our hearts. The players must forget that they are celebrities, with good contracts. We have to make them understand that here in Brazil there are nearly 200 million fans.

What about the "Magic Quartet" of Ronaldinho, Ronaldo, Adriano and Kaka?

Even having four of them is daring [there has been talk of a Magic Quintet, also

including Robinho]. It's almost a 4-2-4, a system that worked during the late 1950s and early 1960s, but it leaves very few players to fight for possession in midfield. Do you think a team would work with 10 Peles or 10 Garrinchas? On the other hand, it wouldn't work with 10 Dungas. The beauty of football is this balance, you have to defend to be able to attack. While the quartet works, I will keep using it. But it will only survive if it brings results.

Who are the favourites to win the World Cup?

Germany and Italy are just

as much favourites as we are. In fact, Germany are bigger favourites. They've played in seven Final games, including three in a row (1982, 1986 and 1990) and they have the fans on their side. I think the team will get better when the tournament starts.

What are you expecting from Ronaldinho at this World Cup?

People want Ronaldinho to do the same for us that he does for Barcelona, but you just need a little bit of reason to see it doesn't work like that. We haven't seen him for eight months. Of course, I want him to do what he does for

Barcelona and he will have the freedom to do that. But I can't let him stand there with his arms folded, like many people want, when he loses the ball.

And Ronaldo? He's not been in great form for Madrid.

When people start questioning Ronaldo, it serves as an incentive for him. It will be a surprise and a disappointment if Ronaldo doesn't have a great World Cup. In the national team, a player is not just picked for what he's doing at the moment but also by what he's done in the past.

Interview by Brian Homewood

'We always try to play beautifully'

THE PLAYER: Ronaldinho

Are Brazil the clear favourites for the World Cup?

People can talk about favourites but once the tournament starts you have to forget about all that.

Does talk about being favourites bring extra pressure, and if so, is there a risk that it will force Brazil to compromise their style?

No. We have a certain style of play and I don't believe that will change. Ever. Brazil always try to play beautifully. Of course there is pressure but we have a group of players with a lot of strength and a lot of experience who know what is needed of them.

Apart from Brazil, who will be the strongest at the finals?

Playing at home gives you that little extra motivation, so Germany will be strong – they have the fans on their side and that always means it is harder for opponents.

You play in Spain. What do you make of their chances?

They're a very good side. I know practically all the players in the Spanish national team and they have a lot of ability.

Is the prospect of playing against Carles Puyol a frightening one? He's bound to give you a kick.

No! Carles is like a brother

to me. We have got on very well ever since I joined Barcelona, we have a great friendship and I have a lot of respect for him. Fear? No. But respect, yes.

Carlos Alberto Parreira has said Roberto Carlos and Ronaldo have been saving themselves for the World Cup. Is he right?

For me, players never save themselves for a competition.

How do you think Ronaldo will do at the World Cup?

I have the greatest confidence in him. People have to respect him for everything he has done for Real Madrid, for the national team and for world football.



As a team-mate I will help him as much as I can so that he can be the man of the World Cup once again, just as he was in 2002.

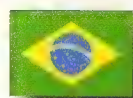
You've won it all at individual level in the past two years. How do you keep motivated?

Now that I know just how nice it is to win those things once, the motivation comes from wanting to win everything lots of times.

You're playing so well that the rumours are incessant. And the name of Chelsea keeps reappearing. What does your future hold?

My future is at Barcelona. I'm not thinking of anything that's not Barcelona. I have everything that I could wish for, and the club have made a great effort to make sure I am happy. I am very, very happy here.

Interview by Sid Lowe



BRAZIL



TACTICS

CARLOS ALBERTO PARREIRA likes to keep things simple – so much so that some critics say you can bet your bottom Real on him making his first substitution in the 67th minute – and there are few secrets about how Brazil will play.

While predecessor Luiz Felipe Scolari used a three-man defence in 2002, Parreira is a stickler for a back four, with Cafu, Lucio, Juan and Roberto Carlos the likely choices in front of Dida in goal. Emerson and Ze Roberto are the holding midfielders, leaving the so-called Magic Quartet of Ronaldinho, Kaka, Ronaldo and Adriano to enjoy themselves up front.

Adriano and Ronaldo play as the out-and-out strikers, while Ronaldinho attacks down the left, playing a deeper role than he does for Barcelona, and Kaka down the right, though these roles are frequently reversed.

Parreira is not entirely convinced that the Magic Quartet is Brazil's ideal formation – it was brutally exposed by Argentina in the first half of last June's World Cup qualifier in Buenos Aires, when the hosts scored three times – and it would probably take only one bad performance for him to ring the changes. In this case, Adriano would probably be the first victim, Ronaldinho would move up to join Ronaldo in attack, Ze Roberto would take on a more attacking role in midfield, with Kaka and either Juninho Pernambucano or Gilberto Silva moving alongside Emerson.

Except in a dire emergency, there is no possibility of Parreira fielding a three-man defence or throwing Robinho into the mix to produce a Magic Quintet.

Carlos Alberto Parreira

COACH 27.02.43



The amiable boss was in charge of Brazil when they won the 1994 World Cup and will be coaching at the finals for the fifth time as he led Kuwait in 1982, UAE in 1990 and Saudi Arabia in 2002. Never played professionally and began his coaching career in 1960 when sent to take the Gambia team under an agreement between the two governments.

Dida

GOALKEEPER 07.10.73
Milan (Ita)
85 caps (0 goals)



Introverted keeper whose speciality is saving penalties. Although he made his debut in 1995 and has played 85 games, he has yet to appear at a World Cup finals. Was reserve to Taffarel in 1998 and Marcos in 2002. First-choice since Parreira took over in 2003.

Julio Cesar

GOALKEEPER 03.09.79
Internazionale (Ita)
11 caps (0 goals)



Controversially picked for the 2004 Copa America ahead of Rogerio Ceni but had a fine tournament, as Brazil won. Raised at Flamengo, he spent six months at Chievo without playing a game; joined Inter in 2005. Displaced Francesco Toldo early this season but now back in the reserves.

Rogerio Ceni

GOALKEEPER 22.01.73
Sao Paulo
16 caps (0 goals)



Another in the line of South American keepers who double as free-kick and penalty specialists. Has scored more than 50 goals for Sao Paulo, whom he also captained to the Libertadores Cup and Club World Championship titles last year.

Cafu

DEFENDER 07.06.70
Milan (Ita)
144 caps (5 goals)



The only man to have appeared in the Final at three successive World Cups and is set to captain the team in Germany if he recovers from knee surgery. Born as Brazil's 1970 World Cup match with England was being played. Runs a foundation designed to get kids off the streets.

Cicinho

DEFENDER 24.06.80
Real Madrid (Spa)
10 caps (1 goal)



Has emerged as Cafu's natural successor at right-back. Impresses with his pinpoint crossing, ability to play one-twos and long-range shooting. Played for Atletico Mineiro and Botafogo, then Sao Paulo, with whom he won the Libertadores Cup last year.

Cris

DEFENDER 03.06.77
Lyon (Fra)
16 caps (1 goal)



Central defender who was part of the Copa America-winning squad in 2004. Made his debut in 2001 but had the misfortune to score an own goal in a 2-1 World Cup qualifying defeat by Argentina later that year and missed out on the 2002 World Cup.

Edmilson

DEFENDER 10.07.76
Barcelona (Spa)
30 caps (1 goal)



Back in the reckoning following a cruciate ligament injury that sidelined him for seven months last year. Formed part of the three-man defence at the 2002 finals, and can also play in midfield. Won three French League titles with Lyon, and the Spanish title with Barcelona.

Gustavo Nery

DEFENDER 22.07.77
Corinthians
10 caps (0 goals)



Hot-tempered left-back who made his first Brazil appearances in the 2004 Copa America. Raised at Santos, he spent four years with Sao Paulo and returned home to play for Corinthians after an unhappy six months with Werder Bremen, where he made only three appearances.

Juan

DEFENDER 01.02.79
Bayer Leverkusen (Ger)
38 caps (2 goals)



Composed central defender who joined the senior national team set-up in 2001. A blunder in a World Cup qualifier away to Bolivia the same year probably cost him a place in the 2002 finals. Played at the 2004 Copa America and is now a regular starter.

Lucio

DEFENDER 08.05.78
Bayern Munich (Ger)
49 caps (2 goals)



First came to prominence for the wrong reasons when he butted team-mate Roger during a 2000 Olympics match. However, his will to win appealed to then Brazil coach Luiz Felipe Scolari and he was ever-present at the 2002 World Cup. Has kept his place under Parreira.

Luisao

DEFENDER 13.02.81
Benfica (Por)
16 caps (1 goal)



The central defender was another player who took his chance at the 2004 Copa America, when regulars were rested. Scored his only international goal in the Final against Argentina, but his aerial power always makes him a threat at set-pieces.

Roberto Carlos

DEFENDER 10.04.73
Real Madrid (Spa)
126 caps (10 goals)



Still the first-choice left-back and his booming, swerving left-foot shots are still a threat, even if a high proportion of his free-kicks end up in the defensive wall. Has won one World Cup, two Copa Americas, four Spanish championships and three Champions Leagues.

Emerson

MIDFIELDER 04.04.76
Juventus (Ita)
71 caps (6 goals)



Defensive midfielder who had a hatchet-man reputation, but now seems to have cleaned up his act. Was due to captain the 2002 World Cup team but dislocated his shoulder playing in goal during a kickabout just before the opening match. Won the Libertadores Cup with Gremio.

Gilberto Silva

MIDFIELDER 07.10.76
Arsenal (Eng)
38 caps (3 goals)



Ever-present in 2002 after replacing Emerson at the last minute, and many viewed him as an improvement on the first-choice as he was less prone to giving away free-kicks. Scorer of the fastest goal in Champions League history – 19.4 seconds – for Arsenal.

Juninho Pernambucano

MIDFIELDER 30.01.75
Lyon (Fra)
38 caps (4 goals)



Superb passing and free-kicks make him a world-class player and he has been a key figure in Lyon's five straight League titles. But he missed out on the 2002 World Cup and is likely to start on the bench this time. Won the Libertadores Cup with Vasco da Gama.

Kaka

MIDFIELDER 22.04.82
Milan (Ita)
33 caps (9 goals)



Restricted to a sub's appearance against Costa Rica four years ago, but the deeply religious midfielder should be seeing more action this time. Earned a regular place after scoring the winner as a sub against Colombia in 2003. Made the often difficult transition to Italy look easy.

Ricardinho

MIDFIELDER 23.05.76
Corinthians
18 caps (1 goal)



Left-footed midfielder and free-kick specialist who was a key player for Santos as they won the Brazilian title in 2004. His close relationships with his coaches have sometimes aroused the suspicions of his team-mates, and he was recently voted Brazil's most unpopular player.

Ze Roberto

MIDFIELDER 06.07.74
Bayern Munich (Ger)
78 caps (5 goals)



Can play at left-back, in left midfield or on the left wing. Overlooked for the 2002 World Cup but back in favour under Parreira. Part of the Copa America-winning teams in 1997 and 1999. Began his career with Portuguesa, and set for a third Bundesliga title with Bayern.

Adriano

FORWARD 17.02.82
Internazionale (Ita)
33 caps (22 goals)



Top scorer at both the 2004 Copa America and 2005 Confederations Cup, although on both occasions he was playing only because regulars were rested. Likened to a horse by Parreira because of his physical strength. Brought up in one of Rio de Janeiro's roughest favelas.

Also in contention

MARCOS (04.08.73; Palmeiras; 27 caps, 0 goals), the 2002 World Cup keeper, cannot be discounted despite being sidelined for most of this year at Palmeiras. Parreira values his experience. If he does get the nod, Rogerio Ceni would be the likely victim.

GILBERTO (25.04.76; Hertha Berlin, Ger; 8 caps, 0 goals) could sneak in as Roberto Carlos's reserve ahead of Gustavo Nery. Versatile, as he also plays in midfield, and experienced.

There may still be a place for defensive midfielder **RENATO** (15.05.79; Sevilla, Spa; 29 caps, 0 goals), who is tactically obedient – a virtue greatly appreciated by Parreira – does not give away needless free-kicks and has good distribution.

Fred

FORWARD 03.10.83
Lyon (Fra)
2 caps (2 goals)



Made his mark with Cruzeiro by scoring 40 goals in 43 games and was snapped up by Lyon last year. Made his Brazil debut in Romario's farewell game, against Guatemala in 2005. Scored a goal after just 3.17 seconds when playing for first club America in a youth tournament.

Robinho

FORWARD 25.01.84
Real Madrid (Spa)
17 caps (5 goals)



Burst on to the scene at 18 as he helped Santos win their first Brazilian championship in 2002. Dubbed the new Pele because of a physical resemblance and his clever trickery. His performances at Madrid have not quite matched his initial promise. Likely to be on the bench in Germany.

Ronaldinho

FORWARD 21.03.80
Barcelona (Spa)
65 caps (30 goals)



FIFA's World Player of the Year for the past two times but has a reputation in his homeland for saving his best for Barcelona. Very much second fiddle to Ronaldo and Rivaldo in 2002 and has blown hot and cold for Brazil ever since.

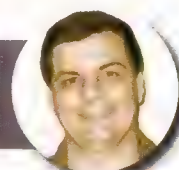
Ronaldo

FORWARD 22.09.76
Real Madrid (Spa)
97 caps (61 goals)



The Phenomenal One is travelling to his fourth World Cup and tends to save his best for Brazil. As in 2002, he goes into the finals surrounded by question marks, this time over his form, morale and weight after another season of frustration at Madrid.

COSTA RICA



GREG REESER
IN SAN JOSE



Holding role...Leonardo Gonzalez and co will do well to get out of the group

real hope of reaching the last 16 is by trying to steal a point from the hosts and getting four points from their matches with Ecuador and Poland.

Costa Rica's best chance of a win would appear to be against Ecuador, the only team in the group the Ticos have beaten in the past. Of the three opponents, Ecuador have the style most similar to Costa Rica's, and the Ticos have often fared better against such teams rather than big physical sides such as Germany and Poland.

Dribbling skills

Colombian Francisco Maturana called Costa Rica the Brazil of Central America when he took over as coach in 1999. Of course, the Ticos are a long way short of the quality of the World Cup favourites, but their style of play is similar. Short, one-touch passing and dribbles are staples of the Costa Rican game, but unfortunately defensive lapses and poor goalkeeping are trademarks as well.

The current side are similar to their predecessors except up front. Paulo Wanchope may possess the requisite dribbling skills and flair expected from Costa Rican forwards, but he is also much larger and stronger than the norm. He is also a fine finisher, an attribute far too rare among his compatriots. Strike partner Alvaro Saborio is even more of an anomaly because not only is he big, strong, good in the air and a lethal finisher, but also his dribbling and ball skills leave a lot to be desired.

The 1990 Costa Rican side made it to the second round, and this is the benchmark the current team will be aiming for. However, the Ticos will have difficulty in accumulating enough points, and while their play should be entertaining, in all likelihood they will make a first round exit.

'The team's best chance of a win appears to be against Ecuador, who have a similar style'

Flair and failings

The Ticos have been called the Brazil of Central America, but their defensive weakness suggests an early exit

IN SPITE OF THIS being Costa Rica's third World Cup appearance (and second in a row), few people outside the country would expect much from the Ticos in Germany.

In Costa Rica, however, where hope springs eternal, fans believe their team will go through to the second round and that they can even topple the host country in the tournament's opening match.

Costa Rica won their first ever finals game,

1-0 against Scotland at Italia 90, and to this day the country's TV stations are fond of showing interviews with Scottish fans outside the stadium before the match, in which they make confident predictions for their team.

While defeating the Germans is likely to be much more difficult, the Costa Ricans don't have to defeat them to make it through to the second round. After saying that the Ticos will beat Germany, most fans are quick to add that their

SCHEDULE

MAY 28 Costa Rica v Ukraine (Kiev)
MAY 30 Costa Rica v Czech Republic (Jablonec nad Nisou)
Squad then travel to World Cup base – the Holiday Inn near Heidelberg, some 80km north of Stuttgart

WORLD CUP GROUP A

JUNE 9 Costa Rica v Germany (Munich)
JUNE 15 Costa Rica v Ecuador (Hamburg)
JUNE 20 Costa Rica v Poland (Hanover)

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COSTA RICA



TACTICS

IN QUALIFYING, Costa Rica used a 4-4-2 most frequently but at times switched to a 3-5-2.

Francisco Porras is the Ticos' first-choice keeper, with Luis Marin and Gilberto Martinez set to start in central defence. Who starts in the full-back positions will depend on how coach Alexandre Guimaraes wants to play. Jervis Drummond (right) and Leonardo Gonzalez (left) offer stronger defensive qualities; Harold Wallace (right) and Roy Miller (left) are more attack-minded. If the Ticos switch to three at the back, Martinez and either Drummond or Gonzalez will flank Marin.

Mauricio Solis is the top defensive midfielder and will have the more creative Walter Centeno alongside him. Ronald Gomez and Carlos Hernandez like to play in front of Centeno, just behind the forwards, and both have good strong long-range shots.

If Costa Rica want to counter-attack, the pacier Cristian Bolanos will be used instead of Hernandez and he can attack down either wing.

If Guimaraes is looking for a more defensive line-up, he will add another defensive midfielder such as Dany Fonseca, and team Centeno with Alonso Solis, who is adept at retaining possession.

Up front, the Paulo Wanchope-Alvaro Saborio pairing brought the best results in qualifying, despite the players being similar in style. Gomez can also play up front, in place of Saborio, when more ball skills are needed. If Costa Rica need goals late in the game, Rolando Fonseca offers a change of pace in attack. Speed is Winston Parks' biggest forte, and in qualifying he came in for Saborio when the Ticos looked to counter-attack.

Alexandre Guimaraes

COACH 07.11.59

A good motivator, in his second spell in charge. During his first stint he led the Ticos at the 2002 World Cup, where they missed out on the second round only on goal difference. Appeared at Italia 90 during his playing days and went on to coach Saprissa to the Costa Rican League title. Born in Brazil but moved to Costa Rica at 11.

Wardy Alfaro

GOALKEEPER 31.12.77
Alajuelense



Has very quick reflexes and communicates well with his defence but his slight build can give him problems in the air. First joined Alajuelense on loan from Cartagines but was signed to a long-term contract after getting the nod over former national team keeper Ricardo Gonzalez.

Alvaro Mesen

GOALKEEPER 24.12.72
Herediano



Costa Rica's most experienced keeper and better in the air than Porras but prone to blunders. Will be second-choice at these finals just as he was in 2002, to Erick Lonnis.

Jose Francisco Porras

GOALKEEPER 08.11.70
Saprissa



Saving penalties is his speciality; his aerial game is not one of his strengths. Came to prominence relatively late in his career, first becoming No 1 at Saprissa and then the national team, aged 32. Popular with the fans and always willing to sign autographs.

Gabriel Badilla

DEFENDER 30.06.84
Saprissa



His pace and agility make him a good marker, and he can be relied upon not to give the ball away when going forward. Although only 21, he has been sent off numerous times, and needs to learn to control his temper; if he can, he has a bright future.

Jervis Drummond

DEFENDER 08.09.76
Saprissa



Versatile enough to play in any position along the back line but most likely to feature at right-back in Germany. A good marker but lacks an attacking edge. Was a promising track athlete before turning to soccer at 16. Twin brother Gerald has also played for the national side.

Leonardo Gonzalez

DEFENDER 21.11.80
Herediano



Relatively tall for a full-back and good in the air but is still agile enough to compete with smaller attackers. A product of Herediano's youth programme, Gonzalez has twice resisted approaches from Alajuelense.

Luis Marin

DEFENDER 10.08.74
Alajuelense



Captain of Alajuelense and also of the national side for most of the qualifying campaign. Very good at marshalling the defence but sometimes holds on to the ball too long and gets into trouble. Has also had short stints at clubs in Guatemala and Uruguay.

Gilberto Martinez

DEFENDER 01.10.79
Brescia (Ita)



Has good speed and is a tenacious marker but a bit small for a central defender. One of Costa Rica's most popular players because of his all-out effort and humble personality. Owner of a gymnasium bearing his nickname, Tuma. Started off with Brescia in Serie A; now in Serie B.

Roy Miller

DEFENDER 24.11.84
Bodo/Glimt (Nor)



Left-back who likes to attack and is skilful enough to play in midfield if necessary. Needs to improve his marking, however. Played in several qualifying matches but then was injured. Joined Bodo/Glimt from Cartagines last year.

Douglas Sequeira

DEFENDER 23.08.77
Real Salt Lake (USA)



Very good in the air and at marking larger forwards but has trouble with small, quick attackers. Has good enough ball skills to play as a defensive midfielder. Moved to MLS last year after spending most of his career with Saprissa.

Harold Wallace

DEFENDER 07.09.75
Alajuelense



Right-back who's better going forward than Drummond but not as good defensively. Known as The Rapper, he came up through Saprissa's youth system before playing one season in the Mexican Second Division after an impressive showing at the 1995 World Youth Cup.

Kurt Bernard

MIDFIELDER 08.12.77
Puntarenas



Leading scorer in the Costa Rican top flight this season. Bernard was once set to sign for Alajuelense but then suffered injury in a car accident and the deal fell through. Eventually moved to Herediano instead before following manager Ronald Mora to Puntarenas.

Cristian Bolanos

MIDFIELDER 17.05.84
Saprissa



Scored a good goal at the Club World Championship last December and went on to take the tournament's bronze ball award. Then had a trial with Liverpool, one of the other competing clubs, but was not offered a contract.

Walter Centeno

MIDFIELDER 06.10.74
Saprissa



Played well enough at the 2002 World Cup to earn a contract with AEK Athens, for whom he scored against Real Madrid in the Champions League, but failed to get a regular starting berth. Not popular with opposition fans for his habit of going to ground at the slightest contact.

Dany Fonseca

MIDFIELDER 07.09.79
Cartagines



Represented Costa Rica at the 1999 World Youth Cup in Nigeria. Beloved in his native Cartago after rejecting advances from Alajuelense and signing a long-term contract with the local club. Worked in his father's lumber yard as a teenager before committing to soccer full-time at the age of 16.

Carlos Hernandez

MIDFIELDER 09.04.82
Alajuelense



One of the squad's most popular young players because of his outgoing personality. Nicknamed The Bazooka by the press because of his impressive long-range shot. The only one of the nine Alajuelense players in Costa Rica's starting XI at the 2001 World Youth Cup to make an impact at senior level.

Alonso Solis

MIDFIELDER 14.10.78
Saprissa



Started out as a forward but now a midfielder. Has exquisite ball skills and is a free-kick specialist, but has a tendency to fade out of games. Known as El Mariachi because of his family's fame as musicians. Plays the trumpet along with his father and uncles.

Mauricio Solis

MIDFIELDER 13.12.72
Comunicaciones (Gtm)



Started out with Herediano before heading to Derby along with Wanchope. Also played under coach Guimaraes with Irapuato in the Mexican top division. Moved to Guatemala this year after winning the Costa Rican League title last year with Alajuelense.

Rolando Fonseca

FORWARD 06.06.74
Alajuelense



The national team's second highest scorer, he shoots with either foot and is good in the air despite his relatively small stature. Came through the youth ranks at Saprissa and made his League debut at 16. But despite claiming he is a Saprissa fan he now plays for arch-rivals Alajuelense.

Also in contention

ADRIAN DE LEMOS (13.10.82; Brujas) was the Olympic team keeper in 2004 and looks set to be the senior side's first-choice of the future.

Defender **MICHAEL UMANA** (16.07.82; Brujas) saw plenty of action during the 2005 Gold Cup and has also featured in recent friendlies. **ROY MYRIE** (21.08.82; Alajuelense) has shown promise in the few games he has played in the national team back line but injuries have hampered his progress. **CARLOS CASTRO** (10.09.78; Alajuelense) was first-choice left-back at the 2002 World Cup but he then had an unsuccessful spell at Russian side Rubin Kazan and has yet to refine his form.

CARLOS JOHNSON (10.07.84; Herediano) can play in defence or midfield, while **BRYAN RUIZ** (18.08.85; Alajuelense) has been playing well in midfield at club level after making a name for himself as a skilful forward. **RANDALL AZOFEIFA** (30.12.84; Saprissa) is an attacking midfielder but injuries at his club forced them to use him as a defensive midfielder, with surprisingly good results. The best years of **WILMER LOPEZ** (08.03.71; Alajuelense) are behind him, but he and Centeno are the only true playmakers available with senior international experience.

Injury-plagued forward **MINOR DIAZ** (26.12.80; Alajuelense) has been on a hot scoring streak at club level in the past few months.

Ronald Gomez

FORWARD 24.01.75
Saprissa



His fierce left-foot shot has earned him the nickname The Bullet. Scored goals against China and Brazil at the 2002 World Cup. Was League top scorer with Alajuelense before moving to Spain, Guatemala, Greece, Kuwait and Mexico. Now back in Costa Rica, with Saprissa.

Winston Parks

FORWARD 12.10.81
Lokomotiv Moscow (Rus)



Inconsistent during qualifying but, on his day, his speed and skill make him a dangerous customer. Parks' impressive showing at the 2001 World Youth Cup earned him a move to Italy with Udinese. Now in Russia. Scored a late equaliser against Turkey at the 2002 World Cup.

Alvaro Saborio

FORWARD 25.03.82
Saprissa



Close to scoring 100 League goals after just five seasons. Very strong in the air and has a powerful shot with either foot but tends to slow the attack down if receiving the ball outside the box. Saborio's father managed Alajuelense and also the national team for a brief spell.

Paulo Wanchope

FORWARD 31.07.76
Herediano



National team top scorer who returned to Herediano in January after failing to see regular action with Al Gharafa in Qatar. Has been plagued by injuries during his career, which has also taken him to England and Spain. Showed promise at basketball when a student in the USA, receiving scholarship offers.

CROATIA

Guest appearance



ZDRAVKO REIC
IN SPLIT

A repeat of France 98 is not on the cards, but the Croats will feel at home in Germany

THE ENTIRE CROATIAN nation is preparing to enjoy Germany 2006. That means not only the 4.5 million Croats living at home, but also the numerous emigrants all over the world, mostly in Chile, Australia and Germany, where they are known as *gastarbeiter* (guest workers).

Euro 96 was Croatia's first major finals, and they've missed only one since – Euro 2000. But none of the previous big-time appearances has stirred as much interest as this year's tournament. That is because of the Germany factor.

Of the 23 players likely to make up the squad, three – Ivan Klasnic and brothers Niko and Robert Kovac – were born in Germany to *gastarbeiter* parents. Klasnic and Niko Kovac are also with Bundesliga clubs, as are three other squad members – Josip Simunic, Marko Babic and Jurica Vranjes. Until last year, Robert Kovac also played in Germany, while Ivica Olic is another to have appeared in the Bundesliga and has a German wife.

Because of all this, and the large Croat community

in Germany, the team are bound to enjoy impressive support at their finals matches.

So, what can the fans expect from the team? In past form, it would be logical to assume Croatia would take second place in their group behind Brazil. However, the reality is not so simple.

Short on class

Coach Zlatko Kranjcar has fewer quality players at his disposal than his predecessors. Only forward Dado Prso is a truly world-class performer, while right-winger Darijo Srna has a solid career in front of him if he can free himself from his contract at Shakhtar Donetsk in Ukraine and move to a club in western Europe. Most of the others are not even first-choices at their clubs.

Despite the lack of talent, the national side have been boosted by a series of optimistic

pronouncements, not least from former national coach Miroslav Blazevic. The man who led Croatia to third place at France 98 said: "Our team

can go far. I predict a repeat of '98, when Croatia were the surprise of the tournament. I especially believe in the abilities of my colleague Kranjcar, who has demonstrated that he's my kind of coach. Croatia can reach the semi-finals again."

However, it would be unwise to expect fireworks from this team. Most of their goals come from set-pieces and the individual efforts of Srna and Prso. Opponents studying Croatia's game will soon realise the need to close down the former and mark the latter out of the game. Presuming they can do that, Croatia will be left needing a lucky break.

The Croats' strength will be their experience, especially compared with Australia and Japan. As for weaknesses, former captain Zvonimir Boban has claimed that the 3-4-1-2 formation places too much pressure on Srna and his left-wing counterpart, Babic. Also, Prso is injury-prone.

Nevertheless, Croatia travel to Germany full of ambition – and accompanied by an army of their home-based supporters. Some 10,000 have tickets and even more will travel without, just to soak up the World Cup ambience.

'Coach Kranjcar has fewer quality players at his disposal than his predecessors'



Home factor...Germany-born Ivan Klasnic and his team-mates will have plenty of support from the host nation's large Croat community

'A first round exit would be total failure'

THE COACH: Zlatko Kranjcar



What are Croatia capable of at this World Cup?

Everybody at home believes we are going to cruise through the first round, they don't consider Japan and Australia true opponents. So most of my time and energy is going to be spent persuading my players to take Japan and Australia as seriously as Brazil.

Is it a problem playing the first game against Brazil?

On the contrary, we have nothing to lose and much to gain. The only problem would be if we lost by a big margin. That could shake us up.

What do you expect? A place in the last 16?

It's logical; we are better than the Japanese and Australians. The victories won't come easily, though,

especially against Japan. In France in 1998, we narrowly beat them 1-0. Japanese football has advanced since then, while our team is not as powerful as it was. But we have a well-constructed team and responsible players, who are also ambitious. We are all aware failure to get through the first round would be considered a total failure.

What about beyond the second round?

The most important thing is to deal with the first round, then we'll see. Our opponents in the second round could be Italy or the Czech Republic. I would prefer the Czechs; they won't perform as well as in the qualifiers.

Are you worried that most of your players are not

first-choices with their clubs and others are injury-prone?

No. The most important thing is that they all arrive in good health. Everybody is going to be motivated because they know what this tournament could mean for them. Seven of our players are near the end of their contracts with their clubs. There is no better stage than the World Cup to show what they can do, and how much they are worth.

How do you feel about the criticism that your son Niko shouldn't have such untouchable status as the team's playmaker?

I don't mind it, but there is no other player like Niko. What

I don't like are the suggestions that Luka Modric or Davor Vugrinec could play instead of him. Modric is a left-sided player who could be a replacement for Marko Babic. Vugrinec is not a creator, he just waits for a chance to shoot. He's more of a forward.

Who are the favourites, besides Brazil?

England, Argentina, Germany and Italy.

It has been suggested that you have a drink problem.

It's true I like to drink a glass, even a bottle, of good wine, but only in good company when I'm not working. I don't let it interfere with work.

'My mission is to score'

THE PLAYER: Dado Prso

How do you view this World Cup?

I'm determined it will be the highlight of my career. It will also be the time when I say goodbye to the national team, and so I hope that my last match is going to come as late as possible, hopefully in the quarter-finals or even beyond. After the World Cup, I will play only for Rangers.

Are you that confident of reaching the quarter-finals?

I know it's a long way to go, but we are capable of making it through the first round, even as equals to Brazil. Italy or the Czechs will probably lie in wait in the second round, and we are

capable of beating either of them. The most important thing for us is to find a performance like the one we gave against Bulgaria in the qualifiers [Croatia won 3-1 in Sofia] or against Argentina in Basle [a 3-2 friendly win]. Certain things have to come together, and knockout competitions bring surprises.

At the start of the qualifying campaign, you weren't in such an optimistic mood.

To be honest, I didn't believe we could qualify so easily. I don't like making promises and I have learned to respect my opponents. We almost came unstuck against Malta. We only drew 1-1 over

there and that almost ruined everything.

Croatia rely on you for goals. Do you feel the pressure?

I don't get stressed but I expect to score goals, that's why I'm here, it's my mission. Some journalists ask if I'm going to repeat the success of Drzen Jerkovic in 1962 or Davor Suker in 1998 and become top scorer at the World Cup, but I don't take that too seriously.

So what can you promise?

That I will fight like never before. I pray that my knees hold out. I'm ready to withstand the pain, get kicked, do the best I can.

How big a role do the supporters have to play?

We are a team that need strong support from the fans, and we are definitely going to have that in Germany, our supporters are just fantastic. It is of utmost importance that the players are highly motivated for each game and really feel the power of the song *Proud To Be Croat*.

Who is going to be the player of the tournament and which team will win?

If I knew that I would earn my living in the betting shop! But I tend to agree with most predictions that Brazil will be the winners and Ronaldinho the star.





TACTICS

DURING THE QUALIFIERS, Zlatko Kranjcar used his normal 3-4-1-2 formation, and he is likely to stick with that at the finals.

The midfield is the most important department, producing the quick-passing style the coach prefers. Much of the play comes through the excellent Darijo Srna on the right flank; on the left, Marko Babic was not as effective during the qualifiers and his starting place is under pressure from exciting newcomer Luka Modric.

One of Kranjcar's main strategies is to ensure there is always a block of seven players who have mainly defensive responsibilities. This will include the two central midfielders, Igor Tudor and Niko Kovac, who have a very strong partnership and cover well for each other.

Further forward, playmaker Niko Kranjcar, the coach's son, is given a free role.

Forward Dado Prso is the heart and soul of the team. His likely partner is Ivica Olic.

The one tactical change Zlatko Kranjcar may consider is to use a back four against Brazil in the opening group game. The experienced Dario Simic would come into the defence, with Olic dropping to the bench to create a 4-4-1-1.

The coach's biggest problem is that there are no quality substitutes for key players Srna and Prso.

Zlatko Kranjcar

COACH 15.11.56

Took the reins from Otto Barić after Euro 2004 and reshaped the team, controversially bringing in his son Niko as playmaker. Won the Croatian League twice with Dinamo Zagreb and once with FC Zagreb. A good tactician and expert reader of the game. Appeared for both Yugoslavia and Croatia during his playing days as a forward.

Tomislav Butina

GOALKEEPER 30.03.74

Club Brugge (Bel)
27 caps (0 goals)



Experienced, unshowy keeper who was long-term understudy to Pletikosa, but the latter's injury just before Euro 2004 meant Butina took the No 1 jersey, and he still has it. Set to join Olympiakos next season. Owns a picture gallery.

Joey Didulica

GOALKEEPER 14.10.77

Austria Wien (Aut)
3 caps (0 goals)



Mobile keeper and good with the ball at his feet. He was born in Australia but has Croatian roots. However, he's not popular with the Croatian public, who feel Standard Liege keeper Vedran Runje should get the third keeper spot. Didulica is first-choice at Austria Wien, having only been a sub at Ajax.

Stipe Pletikosa

GOALKEEPER 08.01.79

Hajduk Split
47 caps (0 goals)



The No 1 until he was injured three days before Euro 2004 and now only reserve for Butina. Failed to get a regular start in a spell at Shakhtar Donetsk and is now back at Hajduk. Has excellent reflexes and is an expert in one-on-one situations. Plays golf in his spare time.

Robert Kovac

DEFENDER 06.04.74

Juventus (Ita)
52 caps (0 goals)



Excellent stopper and also effective as a sweeper, he is a key part of the Croatia defence, though mainly only a sub at Juventus. Previously at Bayern Munich. The younger brother of midfielder Niko; the pair were born in Berlin to Croatian parents. Wife Anica is a former Miss Croatia.

Dario Simic

DEFENDER 12.11.75

Milan (Ita)
76 caps (3 goals)



The only player to have appeared in all four of Croatia's major finals – the 1998 and 2002 World Cups, and the 1996 and 2004 Euro Championships. On course to beat Robert Jarni's caps record (81). The former stopper is now a right wing-back. Has a mineral water business in Croatia.

Josip Simunic

DEFENDER 18.02.78

Hertha Berlin (Ger)
40 caps (3 goals)



Tall, strong, mobile defender who has excellent technique and good aerial power. Injury-prone, however. Another squad member who was born in Australia; once played for Melbourne Knights, a club with strong links to the city's Croatian community.

Stjepan Tomas

DEFENDER 06.03.76

Galatasaray (Tur)
46 caps (1 goal)



Uncompromising battler who sometimes goes too far. Coaches usually detail him to mark the opposition's most dangerous attacker. Had a spell at Fenerbahce but joined arch-rivals Galatasaray after the Fener fans gave him stick following a poor performance.

Igor Tudor

DEFENDER 16.04.78

Siena (Ita)
49 caps (3 goals)



A stopper, but his excellent distribution allows coach Kranjcar to play him in midfield. Tudor is one of only two survivors from the France 98 squad (Simic is the other). Recurring ankle injuries have meant he has not quite fulfilled his potential, though he did win three Serie A titles with Juventus.

Marko Babic

MIDFIELDER 28.01.81

Bayer Leverkusen (Ger)
29 caps (1 goal)



The left-wing counterpart to Srna, though he also covers a lot of ground in central midfield. Has great experience of German football since he is now in his sixth year at Leverkusen.

Ivan Bosnjak

MIDFIELDER 06.02.79

Dinamo Zagreb
11 caps (1 goal)



Very agile, pacy, competitive player who is naturally a forward, though coach Kranjcar uses him as a reserve for Srna, despite their very different playing styles. Had a year spell at Libyan side Al Ittihad; now back in Croatia.

Niko Kovac

MIDFIELDER 15.10.71

Hertha Berlin (Ger)
55 caps (9 goals)



Tireless captain and a true leader. Has a strong partnership with Tudor in central midfield. Also has a strong shot, which he can unleash from apparently impossible positions. The older brother of defender Robert and is especially looking forward to playing Brazil in Berlin, the city of their birth.

Niko Kranjcar

MIDFIELDER 13.08.84

Hajduk Split
17 caps (3 goals)



The coach's son is hailed as the biggest talent in Croatia but does not quite meet expectations. Superb technically and has an excellent shot but tends to carry too much weight. Joined Hajduk from arch-rivals Dinamo Zagreb for a Croatian record £1.2m in January 2005.

Ivan Leko

MIDFIELDER 07.02.78

Club Brugge (Bel)
11 caps (0 goals)



Not physically strong but has a good tactical mind and is a useful replacement for Niko Kranjcar. Also a fine passer and offers a good supply to the forward line. Showed great promise during his early years at Hajduk Split, but his career has stuttered at Malaga and now Brugge.

Jerko Leko

MIDFIELDER 09.04.80

Kyiv Dynamo (Ukr)
32 caps (2 goals)

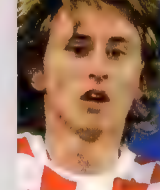


Capable, reliable midfielder who is very strong defensively, covers a lot of ground and also has a dangerous shot.

Luka Modric

MIDFIELDER 09.09.85

Dinamo Zagreb
1 cap (0 goals)



Pocket-sized youngster who has great dribbling ability and an excellent future. Dinamo know the potential and have signed him to a 10-year contract. Modric and his family were forced to flee their home town during the civil war after Serb forces burnt down their house.

Darijo Srna

MIDFIELDER 01.05.82

Shakhtar Donetsk (Ukr)
33 caps (9 goals)



Fast, direct right-sided player with superb control who is normally at the heart of Croatia's attacking moves. Also defensively strong and was the team's top scorer in the qualifiers. Has a lucrative contract with Shakhtar but is eyeing a move to a bigger European league.

Jurica Vranjes

MIDFIELDER 31.01.80

Werder Bremen (Ger)
21 caps (0 goals)



Talented midfielder with excellent technique but lacks confidence and has still not fulfilled his potential for the national team. Hailed as the new Zvonimir Boban when he made his Croatia debut in 1999 but is still not a regular starter.

Davor Vugrinec

MIDFIELDER 24.03.75

Rijeka
26 caps (7 goals)



Has enjoyed something of a renaissance on his return to Rijeka after his career stagnated. He had earlier had excellent spells at Trabzonspor in Turkey and Italian side Lecce.

Bosko Balaban

FORWARD 15.10.78

Club Brugge (Bel)
24 caps (8 goals)



Will be only a reserve in Germany but has the knack of scoring important goals. Had a terrible spell at Aston Villa, where he did not start a single League game, but has been among the goals since joining Brugge.

Eduardo Da Silva

FORWARD 25.02.83

Dinamo Zagreb
5 caps (1 goal)



Arrived in Zagreb as a 16-year-old from Rio de Janeiro and appeared for Croatia's Under-21s following naturalisation. An elegant forward with good technique.

Ivan Klasnic

FORWARD 29.01.80

Werder Bremen (Ger)
16 caps (5 goals)



Another of the squad's Germany-born contingent and sometimes talks to the Kovac brothers in German. A top striker for Werder but has failed to reproduce his club form at national team level.

Ivica Olic

FORWARD 14.09.79

CSKA Moscow (Rus)
33 caps (6 goals)



Courageous, pacy striker but his technique is not the best and he has a tendency to allow chances to go astray. Likely to start in Germany, however. Won the UEFA Cup with CSKA Moscow in 2005.

Dado Prso

FORWARD 05.11.74

Rangers (Sco)
26 caps (8 goals)



The team's most important player, and his goals fired Croatia to Euro 2004. But he did not make his debut until the age of 28. An excellent dribbler with good ball control and also good in the air. Won the French League with Monaco and the Scottish League with Rangers.

Also in contention

MARIO TOKIC (23.07.75; Austria Wien, Aut; 24 caps, 0 goals) would be reserve sweeper in normal circumstances, but he recently fractured a shoulder bone and may well not be fit in time. The aerially-strong **GORAN SABLIC** (04.08.79; Kyiv Dynamo; 3 caps, 0 goals) is another option as defensive cover. Australia-born left wing-back or midfielder **ANTHONY SERIC** (15.01.79; Panathinaikos, Gre; 14 caps, 0 goals) has often been in the squad since his 1998 debut but rarely appears.

Attacking midfielder **MARIO BAZINA** (08.09.75; Grazer AK, Aut; 1 cap, 0 goals) would offer an alternative to Niko Kranjcar but is inexperienced at international level. Former Croatia stalwart **MILAN RAPAJIC** (16.08.73; Standard Liege, Bel; 45 caps, 6 goals) may have lost some of his pace but still has plenty of energy and excellent passing ability. Also, a free-kick specialist.

Forward **MLADEN PETRIC** (01.01.81; Basle, Swi; 7 caps, 1 goal) offers mobility and good dribbling skills. **SASA BJELANOVIC** (06.11.79; Ascoli, Ita; 1 cap, 0 goals) is good in the air, something the front line is otherwise lacking.

CZECH REPUBLIC

Continuity is king



SAM BECKWITH
IN PRAGUE

Coach Bruckner has kept faith with the players who served him so well at Euro 2004

ONCE A MAN already is, he should try to be. And once he is trying to be and he is, he should then be what he is and not what he isn't, as it often tends to be the case."

Karel Bruckner's favourite quote, from Czech writer Jan Werich, loses a little in translation, but it's not difficult to see its appeal to the 66-year-old coach, particularly with regard to the World Cup.

Having reached the semi-finals at Euro 2004, and after qualifying, via a tough group and a difficult play-off, for the country's first World Cup finals since the Czech-Slovak split, Bruckner has had few reasons to experiment and will have one of this summer's most settled squads.

However, continuity is the Czechs' greatest weakness as well as their greatest strength. In Pavel Nedved, Karel Poborsky, Jan Koller, Tomas Galasek and Vladimir Smicer, the coach has a core of players with both the talent and the experience needed to win at the highest level, and if they're fit it would be absurd to consider leaving them out of the squad. All five, however,

are the wrong side of 30, making tired legs and creaky knees a serious concern in the tournament's latter stages.

Both Koller and Smicer face a race to be fit for the finals after knee injuries. There is also concern about Nedved, who briefly retired from international football after Euro 2004 to protect his fragile knees, and Galasek, who has been dogged by injury.

For all five veterans still to be figuring in the World Cup's closing stages would require a good deal of good fortune.

Superstar Cech

Without their older stars, particularly Nedved and Koller, the Czech Republic are a good team rather than a potentially great one. Of the squad's younger generation, many of whom figured in the Under-21 team that won the 2002

European Championship, perhaps only Petr Cech has emerged as a true superstar. Playmaker Tomas

Rosicky and striker Milan Baros continue to show flashes of genius, and

Marek Jankulovski and Tomas Ujfalusi have developed into dependable defenders, but few other squad members hit those heights.

As at Euro 2004, the Czechs have been drawn in one of the tougher groups, with Italy, Ghana and the United States, but they do not have the element of surprise they had two years ago. That, coupled with their reliance on a handful of injury-prone thirtysomethings, makes it tempting to predict a disappointing World Cup campaign.

As Euro 2004 proved, however, the Czech Republic have an abundantly gifted team, true to the tricky "Czech Alleyway" school of football. And in some areas, Bruckner has actually strengthened his hand since the Portugal tournament. The back four, a source of genuine concern two years ago, has benefited greatly from the emergence of tall central defender David Rozehnal, while in Jan Polak, the Czechs finally have another option if defensive midfielder Galasek is sidelined.

Several big ifs hang over the Czechs, but assuming their key men stay healthy, they get out of the group, and avoid Brazil in the last 16, a repeat of Euro 2004's pyrotechnics is not impossible.

'Without their older stars, the Czechs are a good team rather than a potentially great one'



Heads to it...Jan Polak can do a good job as a defensive midfielder if Tomas Galasek is ruled out

'I had a good feeling about Nedved's return'

THE COACH: Karel Bruckner



What do you think of your group?

It's bad that we don't know as much about the United States as we do about the other European nations at the finals because we have to play them in our first match. Of course, we have had people watching them. But what teams show in friendly matches and what they do in tournaments is not always the same. Obviously, Italy are our most difficult opponents in the

first round, but I don't want to make a big thing about it. These are the World Cup finals so of course the opposition will be strong. Our main focus is on our own game.

How important is Pavel Nedved's return to the team?

Nedved came back for the qualifying play-off matches against Norway when we had some injury problems. I understood why he retired from the national team after

Euro 2004, and similarly I had a good feeling about his return. He is now 33 so he's lost some of the pace and stamina he had 10 years ago, but his experience is important.

You once said that the European Championship was the World Cup without Brazil and Argentina. You reached the semi-finals at Euro 2004; can you do as well in Germany?

Of course, how far any

team progress depends on many factors: preparation, strategy, the context of each match and the opposition. Most of these factors are in our own hands. The priority is to produce the best performance we can in the circumstances. Only after that will we look at the state of the competition and look at where that has brought us. If our performances are as good as we hope, then we'll see.

Interview by Keir Radnedge

'The World Cup could be a good farewell party for me'

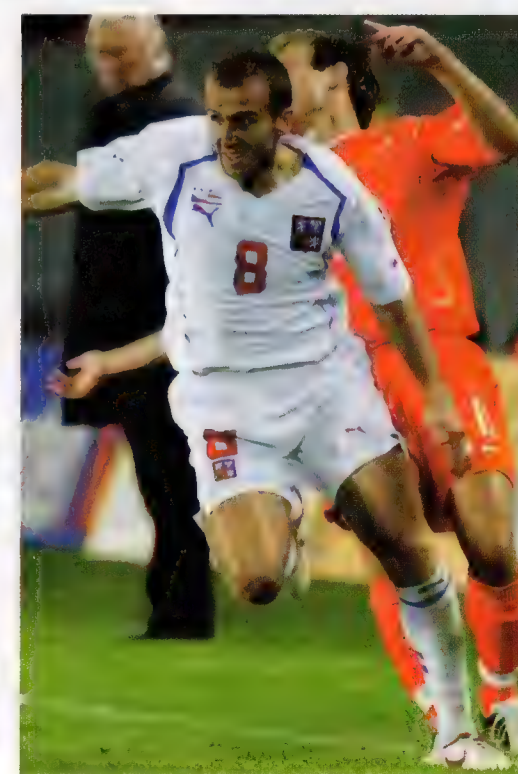
THE PLAYER: Karel Poborsky

You're now playing for Dynamo Ceske Budejovice in the Czech Second Division. Are you worried that playing lower league football has made you less competitive?

No, not really. At my age [34], I know what I need to do in order to prepare for a tournament. Actually, the positive thing could be that I can fully focus on the World Cup and be fresh for it.

Karel Bruckner described qualifying for the World Cup as the pinnacle of his career. Does it mean more to you than qualifying for the European Championship?

Well, the World Cup is a special event in football for everybody - it's the biggest tournament you can play in, and I'm glad that I'll get a chance to play there, too. But I do appreciate the European tournaments very much. It was our Euro 96 achievement



that opened the door for me to join Manchester United and enter big-time football.

How much do you know about your group opponents?

We know quite a lot about the Italians. It's not only that I played there for a while with Lazio, but they're well known to everyone. The other two opponents could be a problem. I can't say too much about them right now, but we'll have enough information compiled in advance.

Can the Czech Republic win the World Cup?

Anything can happen in the World Cup. First, though, we need to focus on the group games and try to advance.

In public, Bruckner can seem very stern and serious. What's he like as a coach?

He's quite thoughtful and friendly. He's got a clear vision

of what he wants, and knows how to motivate his players. He may look old-fashioned, but, if it's needed, he's not afraid to take an unexpected risk. He's a great tactician and he can still spring some surprises.

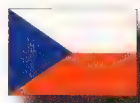
How does Pavel Nedved's presence make a difference to the Czech squad?

There aren't too many players who have won the Ballon D'Or. Pavel adds power and also brings respect to our team. He's a leader, and the team is stronger with him.

What are your plans after the World Cup? Will you carry on playing for the national team?

The World Cup will be my last international tournament, so I'd like it to be a good farewell party for me and some other older players in our line-up.

Interview by Sam Beckwith



CZECH REPUBLIC



TACTICS

KAREL BRUCKNER'S preferred formation is 4-2-2 and the expected starting line-up differs little from that used at Euro 2004.

In goal, Petr Cech is the clear first-choice, with Jaromir Blazek as back-up. Zdenek Grygera plays at right-back, with Marek Jankulovski on the left; Tomas Ujfalus is the key man at the back, with David Rozehnal his partner in central defence.

Martin Jiranek could fill in for either full-back, while Rene Bolf, Radoslav Kovac and Tomas Hubschman are possibilities in central defence.

Now that Pavel Nedved is back in the fold, the preferred midfield is the same as in Portugal, with Tomas Galasek in front of the defence, Karel Poborsky on the right, Tomas Rosicky in the centre, and Nedved on the left. In reality, however, Poborsky, Nedved and Rosicky all have freedom to roam.

Jan Polak has emerged as a much-needed alternative to Galasek, and can also fill in for Nedved; Marek Heinz is capable of replacing either Rosicky or Poborsky. Rudolf Skacel is another possibility on the left.

The first-choice strikers are Milan Baros and Jan Koller. If Koller isn't fit, Vratislav Lokvenc would come into the squad as a like-for-like replacement, presuming he is fit after his own injury problem. When neither Koller nor Lokvenc has been available, Bruckner has tended towards a 4-5-1, playing Baros as a lone striker with Vladimir Smicer behind him. In a 4-4-2, Heinz could play alongside Baros, whose replacement is Tomas Jun.

Karel Bruckner

COACH 13.11.39



The unflappable 66-year-old described qualification as the pinnacle of his career. The former Under-21s boss became a reluctant national hero after leading the Czechs to the Euro 2004 semi in an often spectacular campaign. Has an astute understanding of the modern game and a pragmatic approach to off-field affairs.

Jaromir Blazek

GOALKEEPER 29.12.72
Sparta Prague
10 caps (0 goals)



A capable back-up, with good all-round ability and plenty of Champions League experience. One of the few current internationals never to have played abroad, despite interest from Western clubs. Not entirely comfortable with the ball at his feet.

Petr Cech

GOALKEEPER 20.05.82
Chelsea (Eng)
39 caps (0 goals)



A top-flight keeper since the age of 17, and has already played at a European Championship. Was also part of the Czechs' European Under-21 Championship-winning team in 2002. His childhood ambition was to work at a zoo.

Antonin Kinsky

GOALKEEPER 31.05.75
Saturn (Rus)
5 caps (0 goals)



Firmly established as third-choice keeper, having also filled that role at Euro 2004. Joined Saturn in 2004 after winning the Czech League with Slovan Liberec. Has a tendency to be caught out by long-range shots, but otherwise solid.

Rene Bolf

DEFENDER 25.02.74
Auxerre (Fra)
34 caps (0 goals)



Tough, dependable workhorse. Good in the air but lacks finesse. Hasn't played for the national team since last September when he injured a thigh in a qualifier, but played the full 90 minutes in a recent "B" friendly against Turkey. From the same small town, Viganice, as Milan Baros.

Zdenek Grygera

DEFENDER 14.05.80
Ajax (Hol)
38 caps (1 goal)



Skilful, speedy right-back who has regained his form after a poor Euro 2004. Impressed with Sparta Prague in the Champions League but struggled initially after moving to Ajax in 2003. Recently linked with a move to one of the Milan clubs.

Tomas Hubschman

DEFENDER 04.09.81
Shakhtar Donetsk (Ukr)
20 caps (0 goals)



Strong, quick central defender, good in the air and reads the game well. Moved to Shakhtar from Sparta Prague after Euro 2004, where he played for the virtual reserve side that beat Germany in the final group game.

Marek Jankulovski

DEFENDER 09.05.77
Milan (Ita)
45 caps (7 goals)



Versatile, pacy and skilful player, typically used as a left-back by Bruckner. A regular starter despite limited first-team opportunities at Milan, whom he joined from Udinese last summer. His Macedonia-born father, Pando Jankulovski, was also a footballer.

Martin Jiranek

DEFENDER 25.05.79
Spartak Moscow (Rus)
21 caps (0 goals)



Flamboyant right-sided wing-back, prone to appearances in the tabloids. Good going forward. Took the place of the underperforming Grygera at Euro 2004 but was injured in the quarter-final. Moved to Russia that summer after three years with Reggina in Italy.

Radoslav Kovac

DEFENDER 27.11.79
Spartak Moscow (Rus)
5 caps (0 goals)



Hard-working, committed central defender, though occasionally hot-headed. Can also play as a defensive midfielder and has a powerful shot. Moved to Spartak Moscow from Sparta Prague last year. Girlfriend is Czech supermodel Klara Medkova, earning him the "Czech Beckham" tag.

David Rozehnal

DEFENDER 05.07.80
Paris Saint-Germain (Fra)
19 caps (0 goals)



Tall central defender who's now a regular first-teamer after breaking into the side just before Euro 2004. Good in the air but could be stronger in the tackle. Originally a product of Sigma Olomouc's youth system; moved to PSG from Club Brugge last summer.

Tomas Ujfalus

DEFENDER 24.03.78
Fiorentina (Ita)
46 caps (2 goals)



Marshal of the back four and one of the team's key players. Very reliable, with good vision and distribution. Normally plays at right-back for his club but is used as a central defender by Bruckner. Enjoys making models of Second World War aircraft in his spare time.

Tomas Galasek

MIDFIELDER 15.01.73
Ajax (Hol)
49 caps (1 goal)



Accomplished, unpretentious defensive midfielder who concentrates on winning the ball and distributing it with pinpoint accuracy. Lacks pace and isn't particularly strong in the air. National team captain since October 2004, following Nedved's brief retirement.

Jiri Jarosik

MIDFIELDER 27.10.77
Birmingham (Eng)
23 caps (0 goals)



Tall and powerful, and equally at home in defence or attack mode. Unwanted at Chelsea, whom he joined from CSKA Moscow in January 2005, so loaned to Birmingham last summer and became one of their most important players in the fight against relegation.

Pavel Nedved

MIDFIELDER 30.08.72
Juventus (Ita)
85 caps (17 goals)



Retired from international football after Euro 2004, but "Meda" (Teddy Bear) returned for the World Cup play-off against Norway. The hard-working ex-European Footballer of the Year brings an extra edge to the side. His dodgy knees remain a worry and his temperament is still suspect.

Karel Poborsky

MIDFIELDER 30.03.72
Ceske Budejovice
112 caps (8 goals)



The most-capped Czech of all time. Has lost a little of his once-blistering pace but still a rare talent. Fell out with the Sparta Prague management and opted to play for Second Division Ceske Budejovice, a club he partly owns. Nicknamed Steve, in reference to Canadian skier Steve Podborski.

Jan Polak

MIDFIELDER 14.03.81
Nurnberg (Ger)
15 caps (5 goals)



An all-round talent. Capable in defensive mode but also has the knack of scoring spectacular long-range goals. Part of the 2002 European Under-21 Championship-winning team. Made his senior debut at 18 but was then overlooked for years. Recalled in February 2005.

Tomas Rosicky

MIDFIELDER 04.10.80
Borussia Dortmund (Ger)
53 caps (15 goals)



Brilliantly skilful creative midfielder but his career has stagnated in the past three seasons because of injuries and Dortmund's financial problems. Even so, Bruckner has described "Rosa" as "probably irreplaceable", and he scored seven goals in qualifying.

Rudolf Skacel

MIDFIELDER 17.07.79
Hearts (Sco)
3 caps (1 goal)



Fast, skilful left-sided midfielder who won a national team recall after a successful loan move from Marseille to Hearts, for whom he has been a prolific scorer. "Rudi" joined Marseille from Slavia Prague in 2003 and moved to Scotland after another loan deal, to Panathinaikos, did not work out.

Vladimir Smicer

MIDFIELDER 24.05.73
Bordeaux (Fra)
81 caps (2 goals)



Attacking midfielder who has suffered numerous injury problems but has nevertheless made a great contribution to Czech football. Faces another race for fitness after damaging knee tendons in March. Not a natural scorer, but has a knack of grabbing a goal when it really matters.

Also in contention

Left-sided defender **PAVEL MARES** (18.01.76; Zenit St Petersburg, Rus; 8 caps, 0 goals) has good positional sense and judgement and would offer cover for Jankulovski. **TOMAS SIVOK** (15.09.83; Sparta Prague; 2 caps, 0 goals) can fill in either as a defender or a defensive midfielder, but the Sparta captain's World Cup chances were hurt by a six-month layoff earlier this season.

Versatile midfielder **JAROSLAV PLASIL** (05.01.82; Monaco, Fra; 11 caps, 1 goal) has made a strong case for selection, having missed the first three months of the season with a broken foot. The hard-working **DAVID JAROLIM** (17.05.79; Hamburg, Ger; 1 cap, 0 goals) is also in contention to cover for the right of midfield despite limited national team experience.

STEPAN VACHOUSEK (26.07.79; Austria Wien, Aut; 23 caps, 2 goals) is a left-sided attacking midfielder or forward who would be an ideal replacement for Smicer if he doesn't make it.

The 6ft 5in **VRATISLAV LOKVENC** (27.09.73; Salzburg, Aut; 69 caps, 13 goals) is an obvious replacement for Koller, but currently recovering from a knee injury of his own. **JIRI STAJNER** (27.05.76; Hannover, Ger; 18 caps, 3 goals) is a technically gifted forward or attacking midfielder and currently in excellent form, while **VACLAV SVERKOS** (01.11.83; Hertha Berlin, Ger; 0 caps) is another talented striker who will come into contention if Koller or Lokvenc don't make it.

Milan Baros

FORWARD 28.10.81
Aston Villa (Eng)
46 caps (26 goals)



Speedy, skilful striker who seems to raise his game for the national team. Won the Golden Boot at Euro 2004 but has failed to maintain that form at club level, partly through injury. Moved to Villa in August 2005 when he became surplus to requirements at Liverpool.

Marek Heinz

FORWARD 04.08.77
Galatasaray (Tur)
26 caps (5 goals)



Gifted attacker who made his name at Euro 2004. Has a knack of falling out with coaches but seems to have settled in Turkey and is one of Bruckner's favourites, having emerged from the Sigma Olomouc youth system when the coach was at the club. Dangerous from free-kicks.

Tomas Jun

FORWARD 17.01.83
Besiktas (Tur)
10 caps (2 goals)



A rising star whose ascent has been slowed this season by problems at club level. He moved to Trabzonspor last summer but struggled for a first-team place. Now on loan at Besiktas. He's fast and good on the ball but has a tendency to be selfish and is not a consistent finisher.

Jan Koller

FORWARD 30.03.73
Borussia Dortmund (Ger)
66 caps (40 goals)



The 6ft 7in striker is the national team's all-time leading scorer but also contributes in other areas of the pitch. "Dino" is even a capable replacement keeper. Tore cruciate ligaments in September but is expected to be fit for the finals. Also worked as a labourer during the early part of his career.

ECUADOR

On the level



TIM VICKERY

Reaching the last 16 will prove the South Americans do not need to play at altitude to get results

ECUADOR GO TO their second World Cup at what could be a pivotal moment in the development of their football. They were debutants four years ago and finished bottom of their group on goal difference from Croatia. Should they make the last 16 they will have shown progress and given credibility to the view that they are a growing, maturing force.

But a humiliating first round exit will leave the impression that they are little more than altitude specialists, capable of picking up enough points to qualify for the finals in the rarefied air of Quito, but unable to rise to the standard required when the world's best meet on a level playing field.

The stakes, then, are as high as the Andes. In Ecuador's favour is the experience of 2002, the self-belief generated by their second successive qualification, the emergence of interesting new players, and the clearly-understood approach of ambitious and charismatic coach Luis Fernando Suarez. "I believe we can make it out of our group," says rampaging right-back Ulises De la Cruz. "We have a strong team and good tactics. But we would benefit from having more players in Europe."

This leads to the big question about the team. How will they fare on their first competitive outing to Europe? Very few Ecuadorean players have made the move across the Atlantic. Fewer still have settled. It leaves them extremely short of experience against the style of play they will face from two of their group opponents, hosts Germany and Poland. Defending in the air presents an obvious problem. Goalkeeper Cristian Mora is very slight, so gangling centre-back Giovanni Espinoza will have a vital role to play in dealing with the aerial challenge.

Sacrificing ambitions

The high tempo of the European teams could also come as a shock. Captain Ivan Hurtado, the other centre-back, needs to organise those around him to ensure that the defensive line is not caught flat. In the search for defensive solidity, Ecuador may run the risk of sacrificing their attacking ambitions. Where once they sought to weave midfield patterns, Suarez has them striking swiftly down the flanks. For the system to work, the

full-backs must have the confidence to push forward at pace and link with the creative midfielders. Their willingness to do so will be an important gauge of the team's confidence. If they stay deep, then Ecuador could find themselves starved of possession, forced back and merely hanging on in the hope of conjuring a goal from nothing.

The team's result against Poland on the opening day of the tournament could go a long way towards deciding their fate, since they are not expecting to defeat Germany in the final group game and are aware that beating Costa Rica in their second match is an essential requirement of their plans to reach the knockout phase.

Poland beat Ecuador 3-0 in a friendly in Spain late last year, but the pitch was waterlogged and the South Americans were without both Hurtado and Espinoza. The World Cup meeting will surely be closer, but Poland are firm favourites. If

Ecuador win and go on to secure a second round place it will be the greatest performance in the history of a relatively young footballing nation.

'We can make it but we would benefit from having more players in Europe'

Ulises De la Cruz



Quito kings...but Ecuador need to show they can perform on their travels

'We're going to the finals to win, not to take photos'

THE COACH: Luis Fernando Suarez

Four years ago, your predecessor, Hernan Dario Gomez, stressed that Ecuador were going to the World Cup to learn. You are communicating a very different message.

We are in an interesting phase of development, but we have to progress, and now have the chance to do it. Our minimum objective is reaching the second round, so we will have played one more game than at the last World Cup. I want the players to understand that we're going to the World Cup to win, not to take photos. If we get that right, I have no doubt that this team can achieve important things. I think we're on the

right path, not just for the World Cup but for Ecuadorean football in general.

On what do you base your confidence?

The Ecuadorean player has matured, despite the process of rebuilding that we've been through. There's an advantage



in that seven or eight of our players have the experience of playing in a World Cup. Now we have to know how to manage the desires and anxieties of our young players with the collaboration of the veterans. We're aware that there are big difficulties, but that the opportunities are bigger still. If we get our preparation right, we can face the finals without fear.

After you took over, you very quickly managed to impose your ideas on the team.

The players follow my instructions on the field because they believe in me and because they understand the benefits the tactics will

bring to the team. It's not because I impose them. If the players understand the tactical ideas, then the team functions much better. The key is to have intelligent players who can visualise what it is they're trying to achieve and are able to bring this intelligence to the technical, tactical and physical aspects.

How do you see your group? And who do you see as the likely tournament winners?

In the group, logic dictates that Germany are clear favourites. But we have the chance to finish ahead of the rest. For the tournament, Brazil have a team that is very strong in technical and

tactical terms. I think they start in front of the rest.

Who has been your biggest influence as a coach?

Francisco Maturana. He has been like a father to me, both in football and as a human being. If I've made any improvement as a man I owe it to Francisco, who always helped me without asking for anything in exchange.

You were his player when Atletico Nacional became the first Colombian team to win the Libertadores Cup.

Yes, but I wasn't a star. I retired when I was 29. I want to achieve as a coach what I wasn't able to do as a player.

'I'm in the best phase of my career so far'

THE PLAYER: Cristian Lara

What do you remember about watching World Cups when you were a boy?

Ecuador were never there, so I had to find other countries to support. Brazil and Holland were my teams. I was a bit young for Maradona in 1986, so it was really from 1990 on that I started paying attention, watching and learning and dreaming of being there one day.

Now your chance is coming. How do you feel?

It's a source of huge pride, and I can't wait to get out there, because this isn't something that happens every day. Before the competition

starts there's always a touch of anxiety, but I think this will disappear once we get started.

Do you follow European football?

These days we can see plenty of European football on TV, both the Champions League and some of the domestic leagues. I watch a lot of it. English football is very popular in Ecuador at the moment. It's of an excellent standard, but for my taste it places too much emphasis on strength and long balls. My favourite is the Spanish League. It's given lots of South Americans the chance to show what they can do.

Has the physical development of football made things harder for a player of your small size and slight build?

There's no doubt about it. Increasing emphasis is being placed on size and strength. But there will always be a place for ability. I try to overcome the power of my opponents with skill and intelligence.

Coach Suarez sees you as a second-half substitute, best used against tiring opponents. Are you happy with this role?

I always work with the aim of being in the starting XI, to make myself important to the

team and ensure that I figure in the plans of the coach. If I'm seen as a second-half substitute then it's my job to do it well, and if I come on and make an impact, then that's the best case I can make for myself to show I deserve to be considered for a place in the starting line-up.

Do you hope that appearing in the World Cup will help you secure a move abroad?

Any international tournament is a shop window because it gives you the chance to show that you can play at that level. That's true about the Libertadores Cup, and even more so about the



World Cup. I believe I'm going through the best phase of my career so far, but I know that I can do a lot more, that I'm capable of going on to achieve big things. I want to take full advantage of our time in Germany.



TACTICS

"NOWADAYS," says coach Luis Fernando Suarez, "any side can complicate matters by packing the midfield with battlers. A good team is one that attacks and defends well down the flanks." This is what his side seek to do.

Suarez's predecessor, Hernan Dario Gomez, began the move away from the traditional slow build-up style, in which everything goes through the No 10. Suarez has taken the trend further, with his side now aiming to move the ball forward more quickly still. Ecuador close down the centre of midfield with two tough markers and strike quickly down the wings, with the full-backs expected to link up with the wide midfielders and get in position to give forward Agustin Delgado a supply of crosses. The long-range shooting of midfielders Edison Mendez and Luis Valencia is another frequent source of goals. The pair often switch flanks in search of space.

Suarez says his principal doubt is who should partner Delgado up front. Cristhian Benitez provides penetration in wide areas, Felix Borja and Carlos Tenorio possess goal power in their own right, and Ivan Kaviedes can both score himself and set up chances for Delgado.

Another, more cautious option would be to play 4-5-1. Neicer Reasco would come in at left-back, with Paul Ambrossi pushed up the line to midfield, Valencia would stick to the right and Mendez would come into the hole behind Delgado.

Concern about the aerial power of European opponents may make Suarez reluctant to defend too deep, but the back line could be caught square if they push higher up the field.

Luis Fernando Suarez

COACH 23.12.59
Charismatic figure who like predecessor Hernan Dario Gomez is from Colombia. Won the 1989 Libertadores Cup as a defensive midfielder with Atletico Nacional. Revived at 29 to go into coaching and became assistant national coach to mentor Francisco Matarana in the mid-1990s. Replaced Gomez after the 2004 Copa America.

Cristian Mora

GOALKEEPER

20.08.82
LDU Quito
7 caps (0 goals)



Saved a penalty on his debut against Italy last June and instantly became first-choice keeper. Lithe, acrobatic and stands up well in one-on-one situations, but his slender frame means he is suspect on crosses. His kicking can also be a concern.

Edwin Villafuerte

GOALKEEPER

12.03.79
Deportivo Quito
14 caps (0 goals)



First-choice in Suarez's first year in charge, then lost his place after some shaky displays, wild-child antics (a late night car crash) and the loss of his place at Guayaquil side Barcelona. A switch of clubs has ensured regular first-team football to put him in line to be Mora's reserve.

Paul Ambrossi

DEFENDER

14.10.80
LDU Quito
22 caps (0 goals)



Busy, swift and fluent runner usually used at left-back, although he can also operate on the left of midfield. Not a great marker but makes a consistent attacking contribution, bursting to the byline, linking with the strikers and getting forward to meet crosses at the far post.

Ulises De la Cruz

DEFENDER

08.08.74
Aston Villa (Eng)
83 caps (5 goals)



Despite an unhappy season at Villa Park, he remains Ecuador's most successful European export. A rampaging right-back who is a key part of the team's attack, for his crosses and particularly when cutting in towards the penalty area.

Giovanny Espinoza

DEFENDER

12.04.77
LDU Quito
55 caps (2 goals)



Gangling centre-back known as The Shadow. Can be clumsy and is prone to take risks on the ground, but his aerial power is a key part of the defence's solidity. The only South American to feature in all 18 rounds of the qualifiers.

Jorge Guagua

DEFENDER

28.09.81
El Nacional
16 caps (1 goal)



Tough-tackling centre-back with excellent long-range passing who is reserve for Hurtado. Guagua, captain of Ecuadorean champions El Nacional, narrowly missed out on the 2002 squad having starred in the previous year's World Youth Cup.

Ivan Hurtado

DEFENDER

16.08.74
Al Arabi (Qat)
128 caps (5 goals)



Vastly experienced team captain and centre-back who has played in more World Cup qualifiers (57) than any other South American. Passes well and has terrific anticipation and timing in the tackle. Wins the ball with the air of a schoolmaster gently correcting a wayward student.

Jose Luis Perlaza

DEFENDER

06.10.81
Olmedo
2 caps (0 goals)



Centre-back whose lanky build makes him an aerial specialist. Has recovered from a viral infection to hit form at the right time. His solid performance in the March friendly with Japan should guarantee him a squad place as much-needed cover for Espinoza.

Neicer Reasco

DEFENDER

23.07.77
LDU Quito
29 caps (0 goals)



Squat attacking right-back who can also be used on the left or even as a wide midfielder. Breaks forward with pace and power, and his delivery, while inconsistent, can be dangerous. Likely to join Sao Paulo in Brazil after the finals.

Marlon Ayovi

MIDFIELDER

27.09.71
Deportivo Quito
73 caps (5 goals)



Formerly provided cover for the full-back positions but was handed his favoured central midfield role after good form at the last World Cup. Works hard, plays within his limitations and recently has been taking the penalties, usually blasters.

Segundo Castillo

MIDFIELDER

15.05.82
El Nacional
9 caps (0 goals)



Tall, somewhat ungainly marking midfielder. Has little attacking ability, though does possess a fierce, if wild, shot. Played in the 2001 World Youth Cup, featured briefly at the end of the World Cup qualifying campaign and has shown sound form for El Nacional.

Cristian Lara

MIDFIELDER

27.04.80
El Nacional
17 caps (3 goals)



Tiny, slightly-built attacking midfielder, known as *El Diablico* (the Little Devil), who could also feature in the hole behind a lone striker. Full of tricks and can curl his shots with subtlety or blast them with surprising power. Often used as a second-half substitute.

Edison Mendez

MIDFIELDER

16.03.79
LDU Quito
62 caps (10 goals)



Key figure in midfield, versatile, talented and dynamic. Used in an attacking role, mainly on the right flank but sometimes switching to the left. Strikes the ball fearfully well and has a habit of scoring decisive goals, such as the winner against Croatia at the last World Cup.

Luis Saritama

MIDFIELDER

20.10.83
Deportivo Quito
14 caps (0 goals)



Neat, two-footed, hard-running attacking midfielder. But while Saritama showed much promise with the Under-20s, he has yet to convince he has what it takes to play at the highest level with the senior side.

Edwin Tenorio

MIDFIELDER

16.06.76
Barcelona
67 caps (0 goals)



Spiky, abrasive central midfielder who picked up two suspensions during the qualifiers and nearly came to blows with midfield team-mate Mendez in one game. But Tenorio performs his duties of running, covering, marking and tackling with great diligence.

Patricio Urrutia

MIDFIELDER

15.10.77
LDU Quito
4 caps (0 goals)



Central midfielder who keeps play ticking over with accurate passing and also has a habit of ghosting into the box. Played just 45 minutes in the qualifiers, but could even make the starting XI if he continues to show excellent form at club level.

Luis Valencia

MIDFIELDER

05.08.85
Recreativo Huelva (Spa)
15 caps (3 goals)



Tall, strong, talented wide midfielder noted for his surging runs and fierce shot. May well start on the left but is liable to switch wings with Mendez. On loan at Second Division Recreativo after failing to secure a first-team spot at Villarreal.

Cristhian Benitez

FORWARD

01.05.86
El Nacional
4 caps (0 goals)



Powerful wide attacker who can burst past his marker, cross off either foot and cut in to shoot. The World Cup may be coming too soon, but definitely one to watch. Father Ermen Benitez, a centre-forward, was the first Ecuadorean player to move to Europe, in 1986.

Felix Borja

FORWARD

02.04.83
El Nacional
7 caps (2 goals)



Partnered Delgado when Ecuador sealed qualification against Uruguay and his fine Libertadores Cup form is putting the case for him to retain the role. Nicknamed The Kangaroo for his prodigious leap, and he is also a fluent runner capable of shooting with either foot.

Also in contention

The third keeper could well be the sturdily-built **DAMIAN LANZA** (10.04.82; Aucas; 5 caps, 0 goals), though there is also a lobby for the recall of 2002 veteran **JOSE CEVALLOS** (17.04.71; Barcelona; 77 caps, 0 goals), who has recovered from the serious injury that cost him his place in the side.

Defensive cover is provided by the rather ordinary **JOSE CORTEZ** (21.11.79; Aucas; 4 caps, 0 goals) at right-back; the more attack-minded **FRICSON GEORGE** (18.09.74; Barcelona; 16 caps, 0 goals) at left-back; and the broad-shouldered martial arts enthusiast **JUAN TRIVINO** (03.09.80; Emelec; 5 caps, 0 goals) at centre-back.

Contenders to cover the defensive midfield positions include a former squad certainty, the bulky **LUIS CAICEDO** (02.05.79; Olmedo; 12 caps, 0 goals); **LIONEL SOLEDISPA** (15.01.83; Barcelona; 7 caps, 0 goals), who has yet to shine when given a chance, but has potential; and the slighter **DAVID QUIROZ** (08.09.82; El Nacional; 9 caps, 0 goals), who is also a useful free-kick taker. Left midfielder **WALTER AYIVI** (11.08.79; El Nacional; 17 caps, 0 goals) has always flattered to deceive but is nevertheless talented.

Up front, the options are stocky former Under-23 captain **JHONNY BALDEON** (15.06.81; Barcelona; 12 caps, 3 goals), who specialises in working the flanks; gangling centre-forward **WALTER CALDERON** (17.10.77; Deportivo Cuenca; 8 caps, 0 goals); and the powerful **ROBERTO MINA** (07.11.84; FC Dallas, USA; 12 caps, 0 goals).

ENGLAND

Curse of the metatarsal



GAVIN HAMILTON
IN LONDON

Hopes have dived after Wayne Rooney became the latest to succumb to a broken foot bone ahead of a major tournament

THE OPTIMISM THAT fuelled the belief England can win the 2006 World Cup disappeared within seconds of Wayne Rooney being carried off on a stretcher when playing for Manchester United at Chelsea six weeks before the opening World Cup game against Paraguay on June 10.

The rise and rise of Rooney has done so much to boost the perception that England can overcome the disappointment of recent years and progress beyond the quarter-finals of a major tournament. His likely absence from Germany is a huge blow.

Even without the talismanic Rooney, coach Sven Goran Eriksson can still pick an impressive first-choice XI, nearly all with Champions League experience. But the overall squad does not compare well with rivals.

The twin terrors of injury and player fatigue are now threatening to derail England's campaign completely. In addition to Rooney, Michael Owen's recovery from his own metatarsal injury has

been frustratingly slow, while Sol Campbell and Ashley Cole have returned only recently for Arsenal after lengthy lay-offs. In addition, Ledley King faces a race to be fit for Germany after also breaking a metatarsal.

There is also concern that Steven Gerrard will have played in excess of 60 matches, including the FA Cup Final on May 13, in a season that began on July 13 with Liverpool's Champions League qualifying campaign.

The inevitable hysteria over Rooney's injury – just as with David Beckham's similar worry in 2002 – deflected some of the attention from the stinging criticism received by the Football Association over its bungled attempts to find Eriksson's successor.

The irony of the FA attempting – and failing – to appoint Brazilian Luiz Felipe Scolari has not

been lost on the many critics who have questioned Eriksson's performance in crucial tournament situations. Scolari, of course, has

coached the teams (Brazil and Portugal) that have eliminated England at the quarter-final stage of the last two major tournaments.

The chief accusation against Eriksson has been his tactical inflexibility on the big occasion. Now, with only the most optimistic predictions making Rooney available for the quarter-finals in Germany – assuming he travels in the first place – Eriksson must earn his money as the world's highest-paid national coach.

Eriksson's Plan B, with Owen and Peter Crouch as a little-and-large striking combo, will now become his Plan A.

Other than injuries, one final concern must be that England will be unable to live up to the extraordinary hype created by the commercial bandwagon that is now unleashed before every major tournament. So many companies – and the media, let's be honest – now have such a strong commercial interest in England's success that a realistic appraisal of the team's chances is the first casualty of the World Cup campaign.

'The twin terrors of injury and player fatigue are now threatening to derail England's campaign'



Big man, big challenge...Peter Crouch is expected to replace the injured Wayne Rooney

'I care passionately about this job'

THE COACH: Sven Goran Eriksson



What is your own World Cup history?

It all began for me with the 1958 World Cup in Sweden. We didn't have a television at home so we travelled, my dad and myself, to the house of a relative so we could see the Final on television. Black and white of course, then, but it was fantastic – seven goals with Brazil winning 5-2.

Now that you are approaching the end – and climax – of your England reign, how would you describe the manager's job?

It is the best job in football. Before I took it I knew it was a huge job but not just how big it was and how prestigious. That surprised

me. When Arrigo Sacchi resigned at Milan I remember him saying: "I will not be a manager any more – unless it is as the England manager." That's the thing about the job. I wouldn't change the experience for anything.

Have you been concerned by the number of injuries this spring?

Of course, it's always a worry. I'm very happy that Sol Campbell has started playing again. Knowing that most of the injuries in the Premier League come in the last two or three months of the season because of tiredness, of course we had our fingers crossed for the rest.

SCHEDULE

MAY 30 England v Hungary (Manchester)
JUNE 3 England v Jamaica (Manchester)
JUNE 4 Squad travel to World Cup base – the Buhlerhohe Schlosshotel in the mountains above Baden Baden, 70km from Stuttgart

WORLD CUP GROUP B

JUNE 10 England v Paraguay (Frankfurt)
JUNE 15 England v Trinidad & Tobago (Nuremberg)
JUNE 20 England v Sweden (Cologne)

Did it ease the pressure to get your contract situation resolved?

I was happy to have reached an agreement with the FA for me to leave after the World Cup so that we could then concentrate on our preparations for the finals. It is important to stress how committed I am and always have been to success this summer. I care passionately about this job and I want everyone to know that. I have always enjoyed the incredible support of the fans and I know how important they will be to us in Germany. This summer is the culmination of everything

we have been working towards over the last five years. I've been asked to win the World Cup and after that I've been asked to look after my life.

Have you enjoyed the pressure?

I'm not sure if enjoy is the right word but as a football manager it is something you live with 24 hours a day. I've lived with pressure for a long time and it will be even bigger in the next few weeks – and I like the prospect of that. It's better to have a job with a lot of pressure than with none at all.

Interview by Keir Radnedge

'We owe Brazil from last time'

THE PLAYER: Michael Owen

What is the team's greatest strength?

The best thing we have going for us is that the vast majority of the squad have been together for a few years now; that's important because it has brought continuity. With a couple of exceptions most of the squad went to the last World Cup and we have been able to build up a good understanding and unity. I think we are capable of playing good, high-tempo, English-type football but with some added quality that enables us to compete with the top nations. You cannot forget either the never-say-die attitude that has always been a feature of England teams.

What are the biggest improvements since 2002?

I think we have proved that we are now more capable of coming from behind to win games. Also, Frank Lampard and Wayne Rooney have emerged as world-class players, which has improved the squad enormously. It's such a shame that Wayne may not make it.

What was the hardest part of the qualifying campaign?

Our defeat by Northern Ireland. It was the first time England had lost in Belfast for 78 years and it put enormous pressure on us for the final two games, against Austria and Poland. Happily, we won both to finish top of the group. The lesson is that we must find some consistency and peak at the right time in Germany because, on our day,

we know we can beat any country in the world.

How do you rate Sven Goran Eriksson?

Mr Eriksson has brought a calm assurance to the squad. He never gets carried away with victory and is never disheartened by defeat. He is a quiet and thoughtful man, and I have never seen him lose his temper in the dressing-room. He is very supportive of all his players and has never criticised any of them in public. He will have a quiet word with players in private if he feels the need. He is also a great organiser who pays attention to detail in preparing the squad tactically, mentally and physically for every game. If anyone doubts his ability as a coach they



need only look at his record in qualifying games and tournament finals.

Why do England always attract so much criticism from the fans?

There is always a heavy weight of expectation on England's shoulders because the media build us up so much before every tournament, and that gets the supporters fired up. Then as

soon as something goes wrong, they are on us like a ton of bricks. I can cope with that because I have lived with it all my professional life. We are capable of going all the way in Germany. Now we must turn potential into achievement.

If you reach the Final, which country would you like to face?
Brazil, because we owe them from 2002.

Interview by Keir Radnedge



TACTICS

NOTHING, IT SEEMS, will persuade Sven Goran Eriksson to depart from his beloved 4-4-2 formation – not even the foot injury to Wayne Rooney, which is likely to force a major rethink of Eriksson's personnel.

In an ideal world, with Rooney fit, the front pair would be Rooney and Michael Owen in front of a central midfield pair of Frank Lampard and Steven Gerrard, with David Beckham on the right and Joe Cole on the left. Plan B – tall target man Peter Crouch joining the attack – now becomes Plan A, but Eriksson has few attacking options in reserve.

An alternative would be to utilise Owen as a lone striker in front of a five-man midfield. A holding midfielder such as Michael Carrick or Ledley King playing behind Gerrard and Lampard would get round one of the main problems of 4-4-2, namely that both Gerrard and Lampard like to attack from central midfield, often leaving gaps for the opposition to exploit.

Joe Cole has been used by Eriksson as a secondary forward, but such a move would create a problem on the left of midfield.

In attack, Eriksson has few quality replacements to hand. Jermain Defoe is an obvious option, while Darren Bent is an alternative but inexperienced target man.

In defence, Eriksson has the opposite problem, with, at the last count, five centre-backs at his disposal: Rio Ferdinand, John Terry, Sol Campbell, Jamie Carragher and King. Ferdinand and Terry are the likely starting pair.

Sven Goran Eriksson

COACH 05.02.88
In charge since January 2001 but will leave after the finals following a string of scandals in his private life and criticism of his £5m salary. Failed to take England beyond the last eight at the 2002 World Cup or Euro 2004 but still one of Europe's most respected coaches, having won titles in Italy, Portugal and his native Sweden, the UEFA Cup and Cup-winners Cup.

Robert Green

GOALKEEPER 18.01.80
Norwich
1 cap (0 goals)
Third-choice keeper who has kept his place in the squad despite Norwich's relegation from the Premier League in 2005.

David James

GOALKEEPER 01.08.70
Manchester City
33 caps (0 goals)
Experienced keeper who succeeded David Seaman as No 1 in 2003 but was dropped after a series of blunders. Won a recall to the squad because of the lack of alternatives. Unfairly dubbed Calamity James because of his reputation for making high-profile mistakes.

Paul Robinson

GOALKEEPER 15.10.79
Tottenham
19 caps (0 goals)
Excellent shot-stopper and undisputed first-choice from a very small field of candidates. Has lost some weight since joining Spurs from Leeds in summer 2004 and has been reliable for England since replacing James for the World Cup qualifier in Poland that September.

Wayne Bridge

DEFENDER 05.08.80
Fulham
22 caps (1 goal)
Likely reserve left-back. He joined Chelsea for £6m in summer 2003 but broke an ankle in February last year and lost his first-team place at Stamford Bridge to Asier Del Horno on loan this January to get first-team action ahead of the World Cup.

Sol Campbell

DEFENDER 18.09.74
Arsenal
66 caps (1 goal)
Tall, powerful centre-back who has been troubled by injury this season and can no longer be considered a first-choice. Questions were raised about his mental toughness when briefly going walkabout from Arsenal this season. Off the pitch, he takes a keen interest in fashion and the arts.

Jamie Carragher

DEFENDER 28.01.78
Liverpool
23 caps (0 goals)
Determined, versatile defender who can operate anywhere across the back four and in defensive midfield. One of the stars of Liverpool's 2005 Champions League triumph in Istanbul. A student of the game off the pitch.

Ashley Cole

DEFENDER 20.12.80
Arsenal
44 caps (0 goals)
First-choice left-back who, as a former winger, enjoys the attacking side of his job more than the defensive side. Fined £100,000 by the FA after being caught discussing a transfer to Chelsea in January 2005. Engaged to pop star Sheryl Tweedy.

Rio Ferdinand

DEFENDER 07.11.78
Manchester United
45 caps (1 goal)
Joined Man Utd from Leeds for a British record £29.1m in 2002. Missed Euro 2004 because of a suspension for forgetting to take a drugs test. Comfortable on the ball and a good reader of the game but suffers lapses in concentration. Cousin of ex-England striker Les Ferdinand.

Ledley King

DEFENDER 12.10.80
Tottenham
16 caps (1 goal)
Centre-back who has been compared by Spurs fans to their former player Sol Campbell. Tall, commanding and has a sure touch. Was used in midfield at Spurs under David Pleat, and Eriksson tried him as a holding midfielder against Argentina last year, with qualified success.

Gary Neville

DEFENDER 18.02.75
Manchester United
78 caps (0 goals)
Hugely experienced right-back who succeeded Roy Keane as Manchester United captain this season and provoked anger from Liverpool fans following his comments about the city. Close to Beckham (was best man at his wedding). Sister Tracey plays netball for England.

John Terry

DEFENDER 07.12.80
Chelsea
22 caps (0 goals)
Centre-back who has matured into one of the world's leading defenders over the past two years. Had an unpromising start when he was disciplined by Chelsea following incidents in bars and nightclubs as a teenager. Voted Players' Player of the Season for 2004-05.

David Beckham

MIDFIELDER 02.05.75
Real Madrid (Spa)
87 caps (16 goals)
The captain and the world's most recognised footballer has enjoyed the full support of Eriksson despite dips in form and suggestions that, at 31, he can no longer last the pace. Germany could be his last finals but he may not be able to resist one more marketing opportunity in 2008.

Michael Carrick

MIDFIELDER 28.07.81
Tottenham
5 caps (0 goals)
Born in Newcastle but gained a football apprenticeship at West Ham, along with Joe Cole, Rio Ferdinand and Frank Lampard. A neat passer who has played a big part in Tottenham's push for a Champions League spot this season.

Joe Cole

MIDFIELDER 08.11.81
Chelsea
30 caps (5 goals)
Showed huge talent at West Ham but looked as if he might be merely a bit-part player at Chelsea following a £6m move in 2003. But he has shone under Jose Mourinho in the past two seasons and now fills the gap in England's left midfield, although not a natural left-footer.

Steven Gerrard

MIDFIELDER 30.05.80
Liverpool
40 caps (6 goals)
Inspirational skipper of Liverpool but has not reproduced his club form for England at a major finals – he missed the 2002 World Cup through injury and was struggling for fitness at Euro 2004. Recently voted Player of the Season by his fellow professionals. On his day, the complete midfielder.

Jermaine Jenas

MIDFIELDER 18.02.83
Tottenham
15 caps (0 goals)
Joined Newcastle from Nottingham Forest for £5m as an 18-year-old but moved on to Spurs last summer after complaining about "life in a goldfish bowl" on Tyneside. Has since cemented his place in the England squad.

Frank Lampard

MIDFIELDER 20.06.78
Chelsea
38 caps (10 goals)
All-action midfielder, full of running and invention, with a powerful shot. He has grown in stature since his £11m move from West Ham to Chelsea five years ago and is now one of the world's leading midfielders. Marriage to a Catalan has raised speculation about a move to Barcelona.

Phil Neville

MIDFIELDER 21.01.77
Everton
52 caps (0 goals)
Has been in great form for Everton since his move from Manchester United last summer. Plays a combative role in central midfield for his club, but can also fill in at full-back. Brother of Gary and was a promising cricketer as a youngster, playing in the same team as Freddie Flintoff.

Darren Bent

FORWARD 06.02.84
Charlton
1 cap (0 goals)
The most likely beneficiary of Rooney's injury as Eriksson should now take five strikers (if Rooney travels). The former Ipswich man has had an outstanding first season in the Premier League and offers pace and aerial power, though he is completely untested at this level.

Also in contention

WES BROWN (13.10.79; Manchester United; 9 caps, 0 goals) is back in the running for a centre-back spot after a series of injuries, while **LUKE YOUNG** (19.07.79; Charlton; 7 caps, 0 goals) could make the cut as cover for the right-back slot.

Diminutive right-winger **SHAUN WRIGHT-PHILLIPS** (25.10.81; Chelsea; 8 caps, 1 goal) could pay a high price for Rooney's injury since he is likely to be left out if Eriksson takes five strikers. Wright-Phillips could be pipped for a place anyway by **AARON LENNON** (16.04.87; Tottenham; 0 caps). The teenager has given some hugely impressive performances on the right side of Spurs' midfield this season, and he could become a surprise choice as an "impact" player. **KIERAN RICHARDSON** (21.10.84; West Bromwich; 4 caps, 2 goals) was a revelation on last summer's US tour, but has since slipped down the midfield pecking order. **STEWART DOWNING** (22.07.84; Middlesbrough; 1 cap, 0 goals) is a youthful possibility for the left flank, while **OWEN HARGREAVES** (20.01.81; Bayern Munich, Ger; 29 caps, 0 goals) has dropped off the radar this season, but is rated by Eriksson for his discipline and versatility.

Burly centre-forward **JAMES BEATTIE** (27.02.78; Everton; 5 caps, 0 goals) could provide an option up front, while **ANDY JOHNSON** (10.02.81; Crystal Palace; 2 caps, 0 goals) is a livewire alternative, but has been playing second level football this season. Even **EMILE HESKEY** (11.01.78; Birmingham; 43 caps, 5 goals) and 40-year-old **TEDDY SHERINGHAM** (02.04.66; West Ham; 51 caps, 11 goals) could be in line for recalls following Rooney's injury.

Peter Crouch

FORWARD 30.01.81
Liverpool
5 caps (1 goal)
The 6ft 7in striker has been ridiculed for his cumbersome nature but he is much liked by Eriksson. Moved through a number of clubs – Spurs, QPR, Portsmouth, Aston Villa, Norwich – before starting for Southampton in their relegation season and earning a £7m move to Liverpool.

Jermain Defoe

FORWARD 07.10.82
Tottenham
16 caps (1 goal)
Quick, direct striker who broke numerous scoring records as a youngster at West Ham and on loan at Bournemouth before joining Spurs. A like-for-like replacement for Owen, but has been kept on the Spurs bench this season by the form of Robbie Keane.

Michael Owen

FORWARD 14.12.79
Newcastle
75 caps (35 goals)
Owen remains England's best source of goals, despite the foot injury that has placed his World Cup participation in doubt. Reluctantly joined Newcastle last summer, 12 months after being sold by Liverpool to Real Madrid. Commutes to Newcastle by helicopter from his Cheshire home.

Wayne Rooney

FORWARD 24.10.85
Manchester United
29 caps (11 goals)
A talismanic figure for England even though he is only 20, so his likely absence for at least part of the finals because of injury is a major blow. A world-class talent who can turn a game in an instant. Became England's youngest debutant, aged 17 years 111 days.

FRANCE

Oldies but goodies



HOWARD JOHNSON
IN PARIS

Les Bleus may be an ageing side but they can still be genuine title contenders

PREDICTING HOW FRANCE are going to do in this World Cup is like trying to bottle lightning. If you put aside their embarrassing failure and deserved first round exit in 2002, France's recent showings in major tournaments have been simply outstanding. World Cup winners on home turf in 1998, winners of Euro 2000, quarter-final losers to eventual champions Greece at Euro 2004... it doesn't get much better than that.

Add to that the fact the team have lost just one game – 2-1 at home to Slovakia on March 1 – since going out of Euro 2004 and you would assume they would start as red hot favourites in Germany.

So why are the bookies quoting them at odds as long as 13-1 to take the trophy? Well, the presence of a Brazil side seemingly at the height of their powers has got a lot to do with it, of course. But only once has a non-European country won a World Cup in the continent (Brazil in Sweden in 1958). And if England are being quoted at 6-1, you must look for reasons beyond "the Brazil factor".

Well, you could begin with France's qualifying campaign, a stop-start affair with five draws in 10 games that made the road to Germany anything

but a straightforward drive. There has also been a lot of chopping and changing, with stalwarts Lilian Thuram, Claude Makelele and, of course, Zinedine Zidane having retired, only to go back on their decisions and return to *Les Bleus* last August at a time when World Cup qualification was far from assured. But even so...

Messiah's return

France reacted to ZZ's change of heart with typical hyperbole, claiming all would be well now that the Messiah had returned. Indeed, qualification was duly secured, to a large degree thanks to a superb 1-0 win against the Republic of Ireland in Dublin last September. But with a daily sports paper and a thick, twice-weekly football magazine to fill, French journalists have not been slow to cast doubts on coach Raymond Domenech's ability to turn his undoubtedly vastly talented squad into a genuine World Cup-challenging ensemble.

Their argument hinges on the fact that there have been just eight victories since the one-time Lyon manager took

the national team reins after Euro 2004. Nine draws and one defeat have got no one over-excited. And as the team have stuttered and spluttered, people are questioning whether the last three results – a lucky 3-2 win against Costa Rica, a dull 0-0 draw with Germany and that defeat by Slovakia – only go to prove that France are totally off the pace.

After the Zizou uplift, a sense of reality, if not downright pessimism, has now set in, and people are ignoring both France's recent history and the sheer quality of a squad that includes Zidane, Makelele, Thuram, Thierry Henry, Patrick Vieira, David Trezeguet, Nicolas Anelka, etc.

The reality is that if France perform to the best of their abilities it will take a hell of a team to stop them. The issue is not Domenech's managerial qualities or what has happened in warm-up friendlies. It is whether France can make experience tell when it really matters – or whether this

World Cup will prove a bridge too far for a squad packed with ageing legs. I believe they will come good and at least make the semi-finals.

'After the Zizou uplift, a sense of reality, if not downright pessimism, has now set in'



ZZ tops... France acclaimed Zidane's decision to return to the fold

'I tell the truth without any frills'

THE COACH: Raymond Domenech



What would be a good World Cup for you?

The idea is to go all the way. I'm focusing on being in Berlin on July 9. I believe we have as much going for us as any other team. Are Brazil the hot favourites? If that's so, then why is everyone else going to Germany? In my time as national coach circumstances have dictated that I've never been able to field the same side in two successive matches. But now I feel the team is coming together, establishing a real identity.

How do you see your first round group?

Some will be relieved by the draw, but I have to remind them of what happened in 2002, when everyone thought we were so superior and in the end didn't win a match.

Who will win the World Cup?

The side that prepares the best, believes in victory the most and has the best teamwork. The World Cup isn't just about individual talent. If it was, we would have won in 2002.

Is Germany 2006 the biggest challenge of your coaching career?

I'm not sure about that, but I can't wait for it to start. For a period I will be like a club coach again, and the prospect of daily contact with the players really excites me. The worst thing for a national coach is friendly games, when you meet up on a Monday and say goodbye on the Wednesday.

Do you agree with those who claim France are too dependent on Zinedine Zidane?

Not at all. We've already won games without him. He's a magical player, one who makes the ball come alive and makes others play. But it's not a case of his teammates standing around watching him play.

SCHEDULE

MAY 27 France v Mexico (Paris)
MAY 31 France v Denmark (Lens)
JUNE 7 France v China (Saint-Etienne)
JUNE 8 Squad travel to World Cup base – the Schlosshotel Munchhausen, a five-star converted 16th century castle in Aerzen bei Hameln, 50km from Hanover

WORLD CUP GROUP G

JUNE 13 France v Switzerland (Stuttgart)
JUNE 18 France v South Korea (Leipzig)
JUNE 23 France v Togo (Cologne)

You've come in for much criticism from the media. How have you reacted?

At first, I tried to be myself, to be frank, but I came to the conclusion it wasn't possible with the media permanently exaggerating things. So I switched to a more neutral language. It's a pity there can't be a real exchange of ideas. I've discovered why my predecessors decided not to communicate. Journalists are obliged to spice up the story. I tell the truth without any frills.

But don't you have a responsibility to explain your choices to the public?

No. I will be judged not on

my reasons for picking X or Y but on my results. I don't have to explain what I do. What's important is that I can look the players in the eye and keep my honesty and integrity. Compared to previous coaches of France, I don't think I'm the one who has explained the least.

With the Under-21s, you used to take your players to local museums and monuments. Will you do the same in Germany?

It's possible. I've been looking at a tourist guide. They say the port in Hamburg is nice.

Interview by John Holmesdale

'Victory in Germany will not erase the catastrophe in Korea'

THE PLAYER: Thierry Henry

You've scored goals galore for Arsenal. But there are still some critics who like to point out that defences in the Premiership are not the strongest. Does that make you angry?

Not really. People like to talk. I've seen quite a few players from different championships arrive in England and have trouble finding their feet. Football is not an exact science. Certain leagues are suited more to some players than others.

To achieve universal acclaim, do you think you have to score in a World Cup Final for instance?

Not at all. From time to time even guys like Shevchenko and Zidane find themselves under attack. It was the same for Maradona when he played. Having everyone on your side is impossible. I play a team game. If I had wanted all that, I would have chosen an individual sport. When I go on to the pitch, I'm thinking about helping my side win, not looking to win critics over.

Are Brazil the obvious favourites for the World Cup?

The word favourite doesn't mean much in football today. France are going to the finals with the intention of winning.

If we didn't have this attitude, we might as well stay home.

How pleased are you that Nicolas Anelka is back in the France squad?

I have to say I'm delighted for him. Nico's a friend and has a lot of qualities as both a footballer and a human being. He's been stuck with an image that is far from the reality.

How would you describe France's qualifying campaign?

We didn't start well and at one point many people in France were asking questions about us, wondering whether we would get through. But we put in a big

effort when we had to, winning in Dublin and drawing in Switzerland. At the end of the day, we qualified directly. That was the most important thing.

Why did France do so poorly at the last World Cup?

Because we were physically not up to it. That World Cup was held early because of the rainy season and we were simply exhausted. The spirit was willing, the legs weren't. We can win in Germany but it will not erase the fact that we were catastrophic in South Korea.

Interview by John Holmesdale





TACTICS

RAYMOND DOMENECH had to change his tactical thinking after August 2005 when the Holy Trinity of Zinedine Zidane, Lilian Thuram and Claude Makelele made themselves available for selection again. But the smart money says his starting line-up in Germany won't be far removed from the one featuring all three returnees that delivered perhaps the most impressive result of Domenech's entire reign – the 1-0 World Cup qualifying win away to the Republic of Ireland on September 7. With David Trezeguet suspended, the coach used Thierry Henry as a lone front-runner, with a five-man midfield comprising Sylvain Wiltord, Zidane, Vikash Dhorasoo, Patrick Vieira and Makelele, a back four of Willy Sagnol, Thuram, Jean-Alain Boumsong and William Gallas, and Gregory Coupet commanding in goal. That night, France looked solid, composed and strong in every area of the pitch. The one likely change in Germany would be Trezeguet in for Wiltord to give France more punch up front.

Makelele and Vieira give fantastic protection to the back four, Zidane's creativity and inch-perfect passes form a strong supply line to the strikers, whose searing pace means that there's also the chance to play a more direct game by punching balls over the top if need be.

The balance looks good presuming the old stagers have the legs for an entire tournament, if Boumsong can stand up to the world's best strikers and if Dhorasoo can prove he has a right to be on the biggest stage.

Raymond Domenech

COACH 24.01.52

A model of self-control – there's no ranting and raving. But some in France believe this shows he's too much of a cold fish to inspire his players to World Cup glory. The former Under-21s boss took the senior side reins after Euro 2004 and has lost just one game. But that record will count for nothing if the team falters in Germany.

Fabien Barthez

GOALKEEPER

28.06.71
Marseille
77 caps (0 goals)



Unorthodox and often infuriating, Barthez has nevertheless been an international regular for the best part of a decade. He now finds his place under threat from Coupet. Was banned for six months for spitting at a referee in February 2005.

Gregory Coupet

GOALKEEPER

31.12.72
Lyon
18 caps (0 goals)



His solidity and assurance have played a major part in Lyon's successes of recent years. A recent poll in France strongly favoured Coupet to be first-choice keeper in Germany, but Domenech still refuses to be drawn.

Mickael Landreau

GOALKEEPER

14.05.79
Nantes
3 caps (0 goals)



Only third-choice for France but rated highly in the domestic League. Landreau's prospects of making an international impact should be improved by the fact that Barthez looks like he's on his last legs, and a move to big-city outfit PSG next season can only strengthen his hand.

Eric Abidal

DEFENDER

11.07.79
Lyon
5 caps (0 goals)



A solid and athletic left-back whose physicality may be questioned in Germany. Abidal was at the centre of a huge club-versus-country row after his injury playing in a friendly against Costa Rica led to an unseemly spat between France boss Domenech and club coach Gerard Houllier.

Jean-Alain Boumsong

DEFENDER

14.12.79
Newcastle (Eng)
18 caps (1 goal)



The Cameroon-born central defender has had an indifferent spell with Newcastle, but Domenech has stuck by him. There's a lot of pressure on Boumsong, who's strong in the tackle but weak positionally, to give France the solid defensive platform they need to be true World Cup challengers.

William Gallas

DEFENDER

17.08.77
Chelsea (Eng)
37 caps (1 goal)



A tough competitor and uncompromising athlete who has been tipped to become a defensive star for France ever since winning the Under-18 European Championship in 1996. But, as with Chelsea, Gallas wants to play in central defence, while the coach prefers him at left-back.

Philippe Mexes

DEFENDER

30.03.82
Roma (Ita)
6 caps (0 goals)



The central defender hasn't played for France for over two years, but was surprisingly called into the squad for the Slovakia game in March. France have never conceded a goal when Mexes has been on the field, and Domenech has said he is better at his age than Marcel Desailly was.

Willy Sagnol

DEFENDER

18.03.77
Bayern Munich (Ger)
35 caps (0 goals)



A dynamic, all-action right-back who has established himself as a key defender in Domenech's team. Rumblings that he was on his way out of Bayern Munich proved unfounded, and there's little argument that he's the man for the job on France's right flank.

Mikael Silvestre

DEFENDER

09.08.77
Manchester United (Eng)
37 caps (2 goals)



Out in the cold for 16 months before March's game against Slovakia, but his experience and adaptability – not to mention the up-and-down form of Patrice Evra, his Manchester United team-mate – should book him his place for Germany. Always shows a cool head under pressure.

Lilian Thuram

DEFENDER

01.01.72
Juventus (Ita)
111 caps (2 goals)



Came out of international retirement last year in what looked like an emotional decision based as much on the excitement surrounding Zidane's return as anything else. Thuram has been a brilliantly poised central defender in his time, but Germany could prove to be a bridge too far.

Vikash Dhorasoo

MIDFIELDER

10.10.73
Paris Saint-Germain
15 caps (1 goal)



Not the most popular choice in France, with critics saying he is too slight and ineffectual to merit international recognition. But Domenech likes his neat and tidy style and used him in nine out of 11 matches last year. Formerly with Lyon and Milan.

Alou Diarra

MIDFIELDER

15.07.81
Lens
8 caps (0 goals)



Defensive midfielder whose unfussy style doesn't grab him any headlines, but he's nevertheless solid, compact and dependable. Joined Lens from Liverpool in June last year after failing to make a single first-team appearance in England. Now rumoured to be an Arsenal target.

Sidney Govou

MIDFIELDER

27.07.79
Lyon
19 caps (3 goals)



Attack-minded midfielder who offers lightning speed, an ability to get past his defender and a keen nose for goal. Admits he's no football obsessive and sometimes looks like his mind's not on the job, but he's got bags of ability and can produce moments of magic. Offers little defensively.

Claude Makelele

MIDFIELDER

18.02.73
Chelsea (Eng)
40 caps (0 goals)



One of France's warhorses who came out of retirement to help ensure World Cup qualification. Nobody underestimates Makelele's ultra-efficient tidying up in front of the back four, and he adds some steel with his niggly, sometimes downright dirty play.

Florent Malouda

MIDFIELDER

13.06.80
Lyon
10 caps (1 goal)



Has tons of potential, but we've yet to see him take many games by the scruff of the neck. Malouda has a great first touch, good vision and real athleticism. What's still open to debate is whether he's a big-game player.

Patrick Vieira

MIDFIELDER

23.06.76
Juventus (Ita)
84 caps (4 goals)



A tremendous physical specimen with a true competitor's soul. Vieira's been around the international set-up for the best part of a decade, but he's really been France's driving heartbeat since the turn of the century. Senegalese by birth, but nobody can doubt his commitment to *Les Bleus*.

Zinedine Zidane

MIDFIELDER

23.06.72
Real Madrid (Spa)
99 caps (28 goals)



The talisman. Some say he's too old, others that he's lost the magic. But the whole of France still loves "Zizou"; when he came out of retirement to push the nation towards qualification for Germany there wasn't a dry eye in the entire country. Write him off at your peril.

Nicolas Anelka

FORWARD

14.03.79
Fenerbahce (Tur)
31 caps (7 goals)



Coming back into favour after several fall-outs with those in the national set-up. Anelka is a pure and natural talent whose languid style belies unbelievable pace and an ice-cold finish. He's an enigma, all right, but talent will out and Germany could well be the stage he's been looking for.

Djibril Cisse

FORWARD

12.08.81
Liverpool (Eng)
27 caps (9 goals)



Often frustrating but always interesting. Cisse's been what you might call a heavily qualified success in England. Whether his goals-to-chances ratio stacks up at the very highest level is debatable, but there are few managers who wouldn't want him on their bench.

Also in contention

Right-back **ANTHONY REVEILLERE** (10.11.79; Lyon; 5 caps, 0 goals) is a solid, reliable type, but an injury-hit season looks to have ended his World Cup hopes. Reveillere's stand-in at club level, **FRANCOIS CLERC** (18.04.83; Lyon; 0 caps), put in some outstanding performances in the Champions League, prompting talk of a France call-up. **Gael Givet** (09.10.81; Monaco; 11 caps, 0 goals) and **SEBASTIEN SQUILLACI** (11.08.80; Monaco; 10 caps, 0 goals) are both solid, reliable defenders but their club's poor form means they are definite outsiders for Germany. Another defender, **JONATHAN ZEBINA** (19.07.78; Juventus, Ita; 1 cap, 0 goals), has his admirers but maybe not enough of them in important places to get him a place in the squad. Stranger things have happened, though. **LUDOVIC GIULY** (10.07.76; Barcelona, Spa; 17 caps, 3 goals) has not figured much at club level this season, and although he is undoubtedly a midfield talent, the lack of games could weigh against him. Likewise, former great white hope **BENOIT PEDRETTI** (12.11.80; Lyon; 22 caps, 0 goals) has had a far from stunning season on the first-team fringes at Lyon, doing little for his international ambitions. **FRANCK RIBERY** (07.04.83; Marseille; 0 caps) is uncapped but his selection would be a big PR hit in France. The darling of Marseille looks like a street fighter and plays with both heart and skill in midfield. **JEREMY TOULALAN** (10.11.83; Nantes; 0 caps) is a much-talked-about midfielder who looks set for a big money move to one of the big French clubs in the close season.

Thierry Henry

FORWARD

17.08.77
Arsenal (Eng)
76 caps (31 goals)



A phenomenal talent who goes to Germany at the height of his powers. Henry's been a legend at Arsenal for years, but if he wants to be seen as a true giant of the game then he has to stamp his mark all over this World Cup. He's got the ability. Can he make it count?

Louis Saha

FORWARD

08.08.78
Manchester United (Eng)
8 caps (2 goals)



Highly rated by those in the know, yet it's hard to see him forcing his way into France's starting line-up given the talent that surrounds him. However, Saha has proved doubters wrong in the past with his intelligent forward play, and you wouldn't put it past him to inflict some damage in Germany.

David Trezeguet

FORWARD

15.10.77
Juventus (Ita)
61 caps (31 goals)



Has a phenomenal scoring record for France. Trezeguet does not have a particularly spectacular style, but he shows such ruthless efficiency in front of goal that he has no detractors. Born in France but grew up in Argentina and started his career there.

Sylvain Wiltord

FORWARD

10.05.74
Lyon
77 caps (25 goals)



A willing front-runner who works hard, lives right (apparently, it's rare to see him off the field without a bottle of water in hand) and has reaped rich rewards by combining decent talent with a fierce will to win. Media-shy, but never avoids the limelight on the pitch.

GERMANY

Graft and grind



NICK BIDWELL
IN MUNICH

The hosts are short on class so must call on their traditional virtues if they are to succeed on home soil

FROM THE MOMENT Jurgen Klinsmann was parachuted in to replace Rudi Voller as national coach some 22 months ago, the spin from the German camp has centred on *Projekt 2006* being a cutting-edge affair harnessing the most modern concepts of fitness, nutrition and psychological preparation.

However, the appliance of science alone is not likely to get the team very far this summer. Deep down, all connected with the *Nationalmannschaft* know full well that it will be traditional Germanic footballing virtues that carry them forward.

Arguably, goalscoring midfielder and skipper Michael Ballack is the only world-class performer in the side, who also have far less technical ability as a whole than Brazil, Argentina, Italy, England, Spain and Holland. For these reasons, the Germans have no alternative but to fall back on the qualities that have always served them so admirably at World Cups – tactical discipline, the ability to perfectly pace themselves throughout the tournament and mental resilience.

'A year ago 45 per cent of Germans thought they would win the World Cup; now it is only 18 per cent'

It will not take a quantum leap to turn Germany into a commando unit; the concept of the game as a trial of strength is in the DNA in these parts, and there are few Bundesliga coaches who do not continually stress the importance of winning individual battles on the pitch.

But while an energised and totally committed side is a given in June and July, the problem is that the current team lack leadership. In years gone by the *Nationalmannschaft* boasted any number of influential, strong characters such as Uwe Seeler, Franz Beckenbauer, Sepp Maier, Lothar Matthaus and Karl-Heinz Rummenigge. Nowadays, there is no field general, not even Ballack.

The public's anticipation of Germany's second stint as World Cup hosts is building nicely, with the competition intertwined with almost every aspect of daily life, and not just in the 12 cities staging the tournament. But as for expectations of what their national team can achieve, sobriety is the order of the day. A year ago 45 per cent of Germans polled thought they would win the World Cup; now the figure is only 18 per cent.

Horrendous displays

Few can be surprised at the drop in confidence. Germany have produced some horrendous displays this season – notably in the 4-1 defeat in Italy in March and earlier losses against Turkey and Slovakia – and it is a sad fact that they have not beaten a major football nation since England at Wembley in October 2000, a run of 17 games.

The media are generally sceptical, too, with journalists raising their eyebrows when Klinsmann talks about winning the World Cup. Should the side not deliver, the post-mortem will be a bloody affair. Not that all hope has been extinguished. History tells us that World Cup hosts invariably do well, fortified by the big support and facilitated by often favourable refereeing decisions and a kind draw.

Certainly Germany could not have picked a more accommodating first round pool. Poland, Ecuador and Costa Rica ought not to pose any problems to Ballack and co. The prospect of a second round tie against Sweden (though not England) is causing few sleepless nights either.

The quarter-finals, where Argentina or Holland are likely to lie in wait, could signal the end of the road. And the press and fans would probably sign up for such a scenario now. Reaching the last eight might even keep Klinsmann in the job. The problem is, however, that the coach has higher goals.



Toughing it out... Germany hope players such as Bastian Schweinsteiger are up for the battle

'We must be ready to play hard from the first whistle'

THE COACH: Jurgen Klinsmann

How will your preparations for this summer's tournament compare with those for the 1990 World Cup, when you won the trophy as a player?

Obviously, some factors are different. We will be playing in our home country, and fitness, medical and nutritional support has evolved in those 16 years. However, we still expect to play a German brand of football, which means that our players must be positive, aggressive, attacking, focused and ready to play hard from the opening whistle to the end of each match.

How much holiday are your players being allowed?

The Bundesliga is set to end only two days before the start of our World Cup preparations, so the majority of players will have very little break. Hence, when the squad meets up, we are having the players' families join us for some recreation as well as team-building activities. After this "holiday", we will quickly transform to being very focused on achieving our goal of winning the World Cup.

What will the level of training be like?

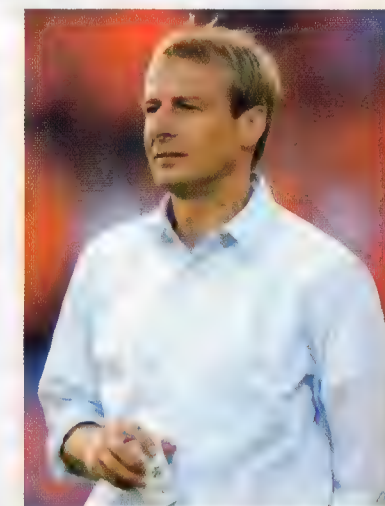
We have two major considerations. The first is to do with the length of the

competition. The World Cup is more a marathon than a sprint, if you expect your team to win the trophy. So the players need a fitness and training programme that is effective in the group stage but that will also build to peak a month later for the Final. Secondly, each day's training demands are customised depending on player and competition demands. So if a player picks up an injury and has to recuperate, then his training might be substantially different compared with someone who is fully fit.

How much contact will the players be allowed with their families and the outside world?

Our players will be able to be in regular contact with family and friends. Of course, there will be restrictions about when they can communicate with people outside because we must have their undivided attention when we are working. But it's important for the players to know that those close to them are OK and to be able to share with them the excitement of the World Cup. One reason we decided to be based in Berlin is to be close to the outside world – and, of course, to be best placed for the Final!

Interview by Keir Radnedge/MasterCard



'We have home advantage and the whole nation behind us'

THE PLAYER: Michael Ballack

Who will be Germany's toughest rivals at the finals?

I'll name the same teams as most people: Brazil, Argentina, England, Italy, Holland, the Czech Republic and France. All have a World Cup pedigree, all have a number of outstanding players.

Germany haven't beaten a top football nation since England at Wembley in 2000. So is it realistic to talk about winning a fourth world title?

Of course. We have just as good a chance as any other country. In a World Cup, anything can happen. We have home advantage and will have the whole nation behind us. With our great team spirit, good tactical approach and

physical strength we can match anyone. Also, we had bad results before the 2002 finals, such as the 5-1 loss to England in Munich, but reached the Final in Japan.



How do you view your group?

Poland will be tough to beat. They finished only one point behind a very strong England team in their qualifying group. With supposedly smaller nations such as Ecuador and Costa Rica there is always the danger that you don't show them enough respect. It's a trap we must not fall into. I'd go as far as to say we'll find it easier against the top teams.

Jurgen Klinsmann previously said he would pick only those players appearing regularly for their clubs. Now he has changed his mind.

Clearly the ideal would be for every member of the squad to be playing week in, week

out. The World Cup is the highest level of competition there is, and the only way to prepare for it is through consistently good displays at club level. If the coach has changed his position, it's because we haven't a wide field to select from.

Many perceive Germany to be Michael Ballack plus 10 others. Is that a burden for you?

I don't look at it like that at all. In a World Cup you don't just need 11 players performing to their absolute limit but virtually the whole squad. Obviously, I hope to have a very good tournament, but personal interests can never come before the team as

a whole. Without a strong team you will never win anything.

You've often said that a team don't need a leader on the pitch. But you are Germany's in every sense.

I still believe that. Talk of big personalities is nonsense. It's up to every player to step up and take responsibility. That's what happened when we got to the Final in 2002.

You are one of the best goalscoring midfielders in the world. What's the secret?

It's a matter of flair, instinct. That's the strong point of my game. I'm drawn to the opposition penalty area.

Interview by Nick Bidwell

GERMANY



TACTICS

JURGEN KLINSMANN is a devotee of 4-4-2, but there is plenty of flexibility within that basic framework. Against theoretically inferior opponents he is likely to use a midfield diamond in which Torsten Frings has the anchor role, Bernd Schneider and Bastian Schweinsteiger push up on the right and left flanks respectively and Michael Ballack plays in behind the strikers. Other variants are to play a flat line of three attacking midfielders with a workhorse in behind them, or use two enforcers (Frings plus Tim Borowski, Sebastian Kehl or Fabian Ernst) and two more creative types (Ballack plus one other).

Klinsmann may even go with a 4-3-3 in games Germany are expected to dominate, though experiments with this system have not been entirely successful. In this scheme, there are two defensive midfielders, while Ballack is given freedom to organise play and break forward.

When up against big footballing nations, the coach is likely to opt for a 4-4-2 designed to stifle the opposition and hit on the counter. The back line would play high, close to a bank of four midfielders, with the two wide midfielders frequently tucking in.

Jens Lehmann appears to have got the nod for the goalkeeping berth, and the full-back positions are the property of Arne Friedrich (right) and Philipp Lahm (left). However, the central defensive positions are still up for grabs; Per Mertesacker and Robert Huth have their noses in front but Christoph Metzelder could yet outstrip one of them. Up front, Miroslav Klose looks set to lead the line, with young gun Lukas Podolski dropping into deep positions.

Jürgen Klinsmann
COACH 30.07.64

Scored 11 goals in three World Cups and won Italia '90. Appointed to lead Germany in July 2004 with no professional coaching experience but has attacked the job with zeal, giving young players a chance and dragging the team into a more sports science-friendly age. Has irritated the die-hards but does not care – the ready smile hides a very single-minded character.

Timo Hildebrand
GOALKEEPER 05.04.79
Stuttgart
3 caps (0 goals)

A very agile keeper who is also expert in one-on-one situations and leaps well for crosses despite not being tall. Has not shown his usual level of intensity this term, probably because of a clash with now ex-Stuttgart coach Giovanni Trapattoni. Poster boy for tyre manufacturers.

Oliver Kahn
GOALKEEPER 15.06.69
Bayern Munich
84 caps (0 goals)

Player of the tournament at the last World Cup and still has great reflexes but has looked decidedly edgy this year and has now apparently been relegated to an understudy role by Klinsmann. In his spare time he plays golf and avoids the paparazzi.

Jens Lehmann
GOALKEEPER 10.11.69
Arsenal (Eng)
29 caps (0 goals)

Has spent eight years as Germany's back-up, most of which time he has spent claiming he should be the No 1. Now he finally has his wish – and must deliver. In the form of his life at Arsenal, where his decision-making on crosses has improved enormously. Must keep that temper under control.

Arne Friedrich
DEFENDER 29.05.79
Hertha Berlin
34 caps (0 goals)

The Hertha skipper has made the right-back position his own but some still feel his crisp tackling and athleticism would be better employed in central defence. Can be rather ungainly and ineffective in attack mode. Recently brought out a football cookbook with a TV chef.

Manuel Friedrich
DEFENDER 13.09.79
Mainz
0 caps

Centre-back brought into the squad after the 4-1 loss away to Italy in March. Sturdy, strong in the air and comfortable on the ball, but lacks big-match experience. Suffered two cruciate ligament injuries within four months at Werder Bremen in 2002 but fought back.

Robert Huth
DEFENDER 18.08.84
Chelsea (Eng)
15 caps (2 goals)

The Berliner is a force of nature, a central defender who relishes the physical cut and thrust and wins his share of headers. But his positional play could be better, as could his distribution. A lack of playing time at Chelsea is also a problem. Known to his club-mates as "The Berlin Wall".

Marcell Jansen
DEFENDER 04.11.85
Mönchengladbach
4 caps (0 goals)

The left-back has been a revelation in his first full season with hometown club Gladbach thanks to a high-energy, adventurous style and he was rewarded with a national team bow last autumn. Needs to work on the accuracy of his passing and his right foot.

Philipp Lahm
DEFENDER 11.11.83
Bayern Munich
17 caps (1 goal)

The right-footed left-back is still feeling his way back to full fitness after a year out with ankle and knee ligament injuries. Presuming he is OK for the finals, Germany will be banking on him producing a few of his trademark dribbling sorties, when he seems to glide past opponents.

Per Mertesacker
DEFENDER 29.09.84
Hannover
20 caps (1 goal)

Lanky, stick-thin centre-back whose nickname is "Latte", the German for goalpost. Renowned for his aerial ability, quickness, calm demeanour and fair play; indeed, some would argue he is too nice to be a defender. Has a tendency to ball-watch.

Christoph Metzelder
DEFENDER 05.11.80
Borussia Dortmund
19 caps (0 goals)

Cultured, unflappable centre-back who was one of the heroes in Germany's run to the 2002 World Cup Final. Returned this season after two years out with an Achilles tendon problem and has struggled. The squad intellectual, he is more likely to read a novel than play cards at the hotel.

Patrick Owomoyela
DEFENDER 05.11.79
Werder Bremen
11 caps (0 goals)

Swashbuckling right-back who needs no encouragement to get forward, is speedy, technically accomplished and brimming with stamina. But his defensive concentration can lapse on occasion. The son of a German mother and a Nigerian father and he speaks perfect English.

Gerald Asamoah
MIDFIELDER 03.10.78
Schalke
38 caps (6 goals)

Attacking right-sided midfielder or striker of considerable power, speed and spirit. No cause is ever a lost one in his eyes. Born in Ghana but moved to Germany at the age of nine and took up citizenship in 2000. Once diagnosed with a life-threatening heart condition.

Michael Ballack
MIDFIELDER 26.09.76
Bayern Munich
63 caps (30 goals)

Captain and talisman. Not averse to a spot of midfield donkey work and has great vision and range of pass. But what really makes him special is his goalscoring flair, the long-range rocket shots and the ability to ghost into the box for headers. Chelsea-bound after a long transfer saga.

Tim Borowski
MIDFIELDER 02.05.80
Werder Bremen
17 caps (1 goal)

The most-improved player in the country over the past two years. The giant midfielder offers combativeness, thoughtful distribution, dynamic forward runs and composed finishing; sadly for him, Ballack got there first. Has promised to dye his hair red, gold and black if Germany prevail.

Fabian Ernst
MIDFIELDER 30.05.79
Schalke
24 caps (1 goal)

Not the swiftest of midfielders but compensates with good distribution, tactical appreciation and creativity. Moved to Schalke on a free from Werder Bremen last summer but has yet to find his feet. Dubbed "the new Beckenbauer" when a sweeper in his younger days at Hannover.

Torsten Frings
MIDFIELDER 22.11.76
Werder Bremen
49 caps (6 goals)

Adaptable type, being equally at home at right-back as in central or right midfield. He is also just as impressive in a holding role as breaking forward, a la Matthäus. Quit Bayern Munich at the end of last season after falling out with coach Felix Magath.

Sebastian Kehl
MIDFIELDER 13.02.80
Borussia Dortmund
25 caps (3 goals)

Defensive midfielder with experience as a sweeper and playmaker. He is totally committed, reads the game well and is neat on the ball, but commits too many fouls. Recently recalled to the team after an absence of nearly two years. Off the field, he campaigns against child prostitution.

Bernd Schneider
MIDFIELDER 17.11.73
Bayer Leverkusen
61 caps (1 goal)

The little right-sided midfielder has not been at his best for his club this term but rarely lets Germany down. His industry, crossing ability and set-piece delivery may be vital at the finals, as could the fact that he can also fill in at right-back or left-back in an emergency. A Sudoku nut.

Bastian Schweinsteiger
MIDFIELDER 01.08.84
Bayern Munich
25 caps (5 goals)

Skilful, attack-minded player who can operate in left midfield or centrally. Inventive and always seems to have time on the ball, though consistency is a problem. Has a bad boy reputation and was once found late at night in the whirlpool at Bayern's training ground with his girlfriend.

Miroslav Klose
FORWARD 09.06.78
Werder Bremen
52 caps (21 goals)

Germany's top marksman at the last World Cup with five goals and the Poland-born striker is once again slap bang in form, at least at club level. Has prodigious heading ability and also electrifying movement and precise right-footed shooting. Celebrates goals with a somersault.

Kevin Kuranyi
FORWARD 02.03.82
Schalke
35 caps (14 goals)

Has not entirely convinced since moving from Stuttgart to Schalke last summer and a knee operation set him back still further. But when in form, he is opportunistic, strong in the air and good at holding the ball up. Born in Brazil to a German-Hungarian father and a Panamanian mother.

Oliver Neuville
FORWARD 01.05.73
Mönchengladbach
52 caps (6 goals)

Effervescent, unselfish little winger or central striker who put himself back in the World Cup frame with a great goal in the 4-1 win against the USA in March. Brought up in the Italian-speaking region of Switzerland but obtained a German passport because his father was born in Aachen.

Lukas Podolski
FORWARD 04.06.85
Köln
22 caps (10 goals)

Pacy, direct striker who was hailed as the team's saviour after netting three times at last year's Confederations Cup. But his form for lowly Köln has been patchy this term and there have been clashes with club bosses. Popular with advertisers, he is endorsing everything from deodorants to computer games.

Also in contention

ROBERT ENKE (24.08.77; Hannover; 0 caps) has arguably been the best keeper in the Bundesliga this season. However, Kahn's decision not to quit the national team despite apparently losing the No 1 jersey to Lehmann has vastly reduced Enke's chances of a World Cup berth.

Right-back **ANDREAS HINKEL** (26.03.82; Stuttgart; 17 caps, 0 goals) has as much talent and application as first-choice Arne Friedrich but lacks his physical presence. **JENS NOWOTNY** (11.01.74; Bayer Leverkusen; 45 caps, 1 goal) is back in action after a cruciate ligament injury and a contract dispute and would be a solution if Klinsmann feels he needs to up the battle-hardened quotient. **LUKAS SINKIEWICZ** (09.10.85; Köln; 3 caps, 0 goals) is a rugged central defender but showed a lack of mobility when appearing in Germany friendlies earlier this season.

FRANK BAUMANN (29.10.75; Werder Bremen; 28 caps, 2 goals) is a highly-experienced club captain and an accomplished defensive midfielder or centre-back. At one point **THOMAS HITZLSPERGER** (05.04.82; Stuttgart; 13 caps, 0 goals) seemed a good bet for the left-sided midfield slot. But his pre-season move to Stuttgart from Aston Villa has not worked out at all.

The chances of striker **MIKE HANKE** (05.11.83; Wolfsburg; 6 caps, 1 goal) making the squad would have been greater if he was not banned for the first two games of the finals, the legacy of a red card at last year's Confederations Cup.

GHANA

On the rebound



MARK GLEESON

The Black Stars are looking for a marked improvement after their disappointing Nations Cup campaign

GHANA ARE AT long last heading for their first World Cup having been in a pre-eminent position in African football for many years. The Black Stars were the first country to win the Nations Cup four times, and it has long been an anomaly that they had never appeared on the world stage at senior level.

But while that is now to be righted, the team's reliance on the midfield trio of captain Stephen Appiah, Michael Essien and Sulley Muntari was cruelly exposed earlier this year at the Nations Cup finals in Egypt, when the team exited at the group stage following a shock 2-1 defeat by Zimbabwe. Muntari and Essien missed the tournament

though injury, although the latter's did not appear 100 per cent genuine, for which he attracted stinging criticism. Appiah, meanwhile, gamely struggled through the tournament with an ankle problem.

In other departments, notably attack, Ghana have been far from convincing and have spent the time since January seeking alternatives to bolster their squad. Serb coach Ratomir Dujkovic has been forced to arrange friendlies against European club sides to test out potential candidates within a month of the World Cup kick-off. Apart from the main midfield trio, only Samuel Osei Kuffour in defence and striker Matthew Amoah look certain to be in the starting line-up, and that is presuming the latter gets over his injury problems.

Miraculous comeback

For Dujkovic, this year's travails have been in marked contrast to the achievements of 2005, when he engineered a miraculous comeback in the World Cup qualifiers. Ghana were trailing group leaders South Africa by three points with three matches to go but beat their rivals 2-0 in Johannesburg last June to take the whip hand.

It was a convincing turnaround by the Black Stars, who went through four coaches during the campaign and myriad team selections.

They began the qualifiers under Ralf Zumdick, but he was due to return to his native Germany to become assistant at Hamburg at the end of 2003. His replacement, Mariano Barretto, lasted nine months until tempted away by club side Maritimo in his native Portugal. Sam Arday was caretaker for one game before Dujkovic's arrival. Under the

Serb, Ghana were undefeated in their 2005 qualifiers, clinching their finals place in October.

Ghana are among Africa's oldest footballing powers, having been one of the first post-independence countries to join FIFA. They won the Nations Cup twice in the 1960s under Charles "CK" Gyamfi, who was an early African star in European football when playing in Germany just before the launch of the Bundesliga. Ghana won again, on home soil, in 1978, and in 1982 in Libya, when a 17-year-old Abedi Pele was in the line-up.

Ghana have also been successful in FIFA's youth competitions, though two past successes at Under-17 level have been tainted by subsequent revelations of age cheating.

Now they get their chance on the world stage at senior level, but their inexperience and over-reliance on a few key players may cost them dear.

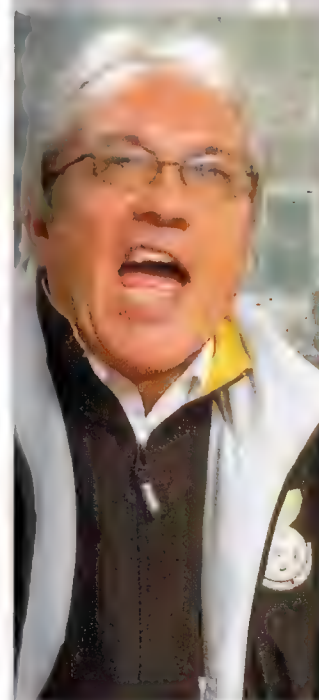


Raring to go...striker Matthew Amoah is one of the few Ghanaians assured of a start in Germany

'Ghana's inexperience and over-reliance on a few key players may cost them dear'

'I'd call up the devil if he could help me'

THE COACH: Ratomir Dujkovic



Who are your key players?

The midfielders. I expect a lot of them at the World Cup. Of course, this doesn't mean that the other players are poorer. On the contrary; the strength of this team is their strong collective play.

Samuel Kuffour is playing for Ghana again after you had a fall-out. Did he apologise to you and the team, as you insisted he must do, or were you forced to call him up?

Well, Kuffour made a half-apology and I partly gave in. During the qualifying campaign there was awful pressure on me to bring him back, but I refused. After we qualified, the pressure disappeared, because they saw that we could achieve things without him. Still, the World Cup is the biggest

football event, and in order to achieve the best possible result, I would call up the devil if he could help me. So I decided to be flexible and to give him another chance. I told him that in our team all players were equal, and if he wanted to be part of it he had to accept it. He agreed and now we have no problems.

What are the main differences between playing African teams and playing European and South American teams?

If we play African teams, it is all about gaining prestige on a continental level. Against European teams, the players give their all, in the hope that a European club will sign them. The players suddenly perform with European-style tactical discipline because

they know that otherwise they wouldn't be considered by the clubs. I'm not the first to say that poor discipline is the biggest problem of African football. As far as South American teams are concerned, African sides have an advantage because of natural speed.

What is your objective in Germany?

Well, our group is extremely difficult. Our opponents are all in the top 10 in the FIFA rankings. We must be realistic. Only then can we perhaps surprise. We will try to get past the group stage. For

me that would be like winning the World Cup. I'm a little bit concerned about the first game, against Italy, because of the big pressure on our players and because of Italy's huge advantage in terms of experience. Secretly, I hope that they might underestimate us and that we could exploit it.

Can an African team ever win the World Cup?

Given the talent and passion for football, and how much is invested in it in Africa, one can expect that in 12 to 16 years' time an African team can win the trophy.

Interview by Vladimir Novak

'I want to be seen as a guy who unsettles people'

THE PLAYER: Michael Essien

Did you regret missing the African Nations Cup?

The agreement was that I would join up with the squad, but then I got injured and we had to change the plan. I watched the games on TV and the team were unlucky, but hopefully we can put that right in the World Cup.

Some in Ghana believe Ratomir Dujkovic should have stepped aside and allowed a more experienced man to take over. Is that fair?

No, it's not. He got us to the finals for the first time and now deserves his chance to lead the team. Also, we had some big players missing from the Nations Cup team.

Are you fully committed to the international cause?

No question. I love playing for Ghana and will play in any friendly game ahead of the World Cup. Some people say I won't play in warm-up games, but this isn't true. This is the greatest moment of my career and I want to be ready for it.

How well can Ghana do in Germany?

We have to go there feeling positive. We have earned the right to play in the finals and have to make the most of the chance. We'll be underestimated but that is a good thing.

Some people are saying you'll have to be especially

careful about your tackling at the World Cup.

Maybe, but I don't see this as a problem. I have rightly been criticised for committing too many fouls and receiving too many yellow cards. I like to see myself as a team player. As a defensive midfielder, my role models are Patrick Vieira and Claude Makelele, and they are strong players, yet fair.

Have you changed your approach to tackling after your foul on Didi Hamann brought you a Champions League ban this season?

A little. I'm trying to be more careful when I go into contact with the ball. Still, I have to remain strong on the

pitch. This game is about physical contact and I cannot stop that happening. I never intend to hurt anyone, but I also want to be seen as a guy who unsettles people. I needed time to adjust to the English game but I'm getting there.

Where is your best position?

I can play in central midfield, on the right flank or in central defence. My best asset is my ability to win the ball. It's up to the coach to decide where I'm needed, but I'm happiest being in the thick of the action in midfield. I need to go to my physical limits, and at the back I don't feel particularly extended.

Interview by Kevin Palmer





TACTICS

GHANA'S QUALIFICATION was built on their brilliant midfield, which is led by Stephen Appiah. The playmaker produced bags of craft and guile, as well as vital goals, to carry the side to Germany. Support came from Michael Essien, with his graft and passing ability, and the speed of right-winger Sulley Muntari. They will again be the driving force of the team in Germany.

Sammy Adjei is first-choice keeper; John Mensah and Samuel Osei Kuffour are expected to start in central defence; and Hans Sarpei (left) and Issah Ahmed (right) should take the full-back slots.

The other midfield place goes to exciting find Haminu Dramani, who plays wide on the left. The Black Stars' use of the flanks is the key component of their game, but they are still looking for forwards to make the most of the supply line created by the wide men. Germany-based Matthew Amoah and Isaac Boakye are the likely pairing up front, though both have battled with injury in recent months. Beyond them, the cupboard is almost bare. Coach Ratimir Djukovic may be forced to give teenager Prince Tagoe and Russia-based Baba Armando Adamu a responsibility that may well be beyond their ability.

Ratimir Djukovic

COACH 21.09.51



Serb with good experience of coaching at major tournaments, having led Venezuela at the 1993 Copa America and Rwanda at the 2004 African Nations Cup. He took the Ghana reins in December 2004, leading the country to their first World Cup. Formerly a keeper with Red Star Belgrade and played for Yugoslavia.

Sammy Adjei

GOALKEEPER 01.09.80
MS Ashdod (Isr)
29 caps (0 goals)



Ghana's first-choice keeper began his career at Asante Kotoko in Kumasi, but has since joined the large Ghanaian exodus to Israel. Made his debut in a World Cup qualifier against Sudan in 2001 but battled for years to gain the No 1 jersey.

Richard Kingston

GOALKEEPER 13.07.75
Ankaraspor (Tur)
29 caps (0 goals)



Was called up for recent friendlies after being out of the national team set-up for some time and may well make the cut.

George Owu

GOALKEEPER 07.07.82
Ashanti Gold
6 caps (0 goals)



Played for Asante Kotoko, with whom he reached the 2004 African Confederation Cup Final; now at Obuasi-based Ashanti Gold. Made his debut for the Black Stars against Somalia at the start of the qualifiers for this summer's finals.

Issah Ahmed

DEFENDER 24.05.82
Randers (Den)
10 caps (0 goals)



Right-back who captained Asante Kotoko to the Ghanaian League title last year and was player of the season. Moved to Denmark after the Nations Cup earlier this year. Played in the last four World Cup qualifiers.

Francis Dickoh

DEFENDER 13.12.82
Nordsjaelland (Den)
2 caps (0 goals)



Born in Denmark to Ghanaian parents, he received a first call-up by the Black Stars after World Cup qualification had been secured. Taken to the Nations Cup finals in Egypt but did not get any playing time and is unlikely to feature prominently in Germany.

Samuel Osei Kuffour

DEFENDER 03.09.76
Roma (Ita)
56 caps (3 goals)



A tiff with Djukovic meant Kuffour missed the second half of the World Cup qualifiers but the pair made up last November. A Bundesliga winner with Bayern Munich, where his no-nonsense tackling and passionate displays made him a fan favourite.

John Mensah

DEFENDER 26.11.82
Rennes (Fra)
30 caps (0 goals)



Has had an outstanding few months at high-flying Rennes in the French League, and his loan move from Chievo in Italy has been made permanent. Can play at left-back or in central defence. Part of the Ghana side that were runners-up in the 2001 World Youth Cup.

John Paintsil

DEFENDER 15.06.81
Hapoel Tel Aviv (Isr)
19 caps (0 goals)



Another graduate of Ghana's successful youth sides and pushing hard to be the senior team's first-choice right-back. Played briefly in Poland at Widzew Lodz before moving to Israel, where he switched clubs at the start of the season, from Maccabi Tel Aviv to neighbours Hapoel.

Emmanuel Pappoe

DEFENDER 03.03.81
Hapoel Kfar Saba (Isr)
25 caps (0 goals)



Was a regular during the qualifying campaign after suffering several years in the international wilderness.

Hans Sarpei

DEFENDER 28.06.76
Wolfsburg (Ger)
6 caps (0 goals)



Born in Ghana but raised in Germany and has played at several Bundesliga clubs, including Duisburg and now Wolfsburg. The left-back made his Ghana debut in 2000 but was then out of favour until recalled by Djukovic last year.

Otto Addo

MIDFIELDER 09.06.75
Mainz (Ger)
11 caps (1 goal)



The injury-prone midfielder was one of several players brought out of the woodwork following Ghana's poor performance at the Nations Cup in January. Played for the first time in four years in the friendly against Mexico in March. Has spent most of his career with German clubs.

Stephen Appiah

MIDFIELDER 24.12.80
Fenerbahce (Tur)
39 caps (10 goals)



Made his senior national team debut on his 16th birthday and played at both the Under-17 and Under-20 world championships. Signed by Udinese in Italy as a 17-year-old, moving to Parma, Brescia and then Juventus, with whom he won a Serie A title. Joined Fenerbahce last summer.

Godwin Attram

MIDFIELDER 07.08.80
Al Shabab (Sau)
10 caps (1 goal)



Arguably the most successful African player in the Saudi League over the past five years. First came to prominence in Ghana's Under-17 side who were runners-up at the world championship in 1997. He was then snapped up by PSV Eindhoven but didn't make the grade.

Haminu Dramani

MIDFIELDER 01.04.86
Red Star Belgrade (Ser)
6 caps (0 goals)



Quickly came to the attention of Djukovic after he arrived in Ghana last year and was recommended to Red Star Belgrade, the coach's former club. Offers lots of pace in left midfield and made a strong impression at this year's Nations Cup.

Michael Essien

MIDFIELDER 03.12.82
Chelsea (Eng)
14 caps (3 goals)



Africa's most expensive footballer played a pivotal role in the qualifiers. Rejected as a youngster by Manchester United but cost Chelsea a packet when he joined them from Lyon last year. Timid as a teenager — his mother had to persuade him to play when first called into Ghana's Under-17s.

Sulley Muntari

MIDFIELDER 27.08.84
Udinese (Ita)
13 caps (3 goals)



His precocious talent has been tempered by disciplinary problems. Had a trial as a teenager at Manchester United but signed for Udinese after the 2001 World Youth Cup in Argentina. Injury kept him out of this year's Nations Cup.

Abubakari Yakubu

MIDFIELDER 13.12.81
Vitesse Arnhem (Hol)
14 caps (0 goals)



Signed by Ajax while still a teenager in 1999 and spent five seasons in the first-team squad before being loaned to Vitesse. His move was made permanent at the start of the current campaign and he has become a firm favourite with the fans in Arnhem.

Baba Armando Adamu

FORWARD 20.10.79
Kryliya Sovetov (Rus)
6 caps (1 goal)



Won a surprise call to Ghana's squad for the Nations Cup finals, having played no part in the World Cup qualifying campaign. Got a goal in the final group game in Egypt, against Zimbabwe. Previously on the books of former Russian champions Lokomotiv Moscow.

Matthew Amoah

FORWARD 24.10.80
Borussia Dortmund (Ger)
13 caps (5 goals)



An injury picked up at the Nations Cup delayed his debut at Dortmund, who bought him from Vitesse Arnhem in January. Amoah also played at the 2002 Nations Cup but was largely ignored by Ghana after that until Djukovic recalled him because of a dearth of strikers.

Also in contention

Keeper **PHILEMON MCCARTHY** (14.08.83; Fetteh Feyenoord; 0 caps) has been included in recent squads and is the first product of the academy run by Feyenoord of Holland outside Accra to enter the senior Ghana team set-up.

Centre-back **ERIC ADDO** (12.11.78; PSV Eindhoven, Hol; 3 caps, 0 goals) last played for Ghana in 1998 but his exploits at PSV, with whom he has just won the Dutch title, could earn him a recall. Other defenders in the frame include Ghana-based **AZIZ ANSAH** (07.10.80; Asante Kotoko; 9 caps, 0 goals), the experienced **KOFI AMPONSAH** (23.04.78; Apollon, Gre; 14 caps, 0 goals), and **DANIEL EDUSEI** (02.09.80; Aigaleo, Gre; 18 caps, 0 goals), who has been in and out of the Ghana side over the past few years.

Midfielder **HAMZA MOHAMMED** (05.11.80; Real Tamale United; 25 caps, 1 goal) has spent much more time on the Ghana bench than on the pitch, but is still in the running for a finals place.

Forward **ELVIS HAMMOND** (06.10.80; Leicester, Eng; 1 cap, 0 goals) is a graduate of Fulham's youth scheme but was born in Accra and won his first cap for Ghana in March.

Isaac Boakye

FORWARD 26.11.81
Arminia Bielefeld (Ger)
18 caps (6 goals)



Injury has limited his playing time this season but he should make it to the World Cup, especially since his surprise omission from the Nations Cup finals was sorely felt. Scored on his debut for Ghana in 2001 and played at the 2002 Nations Cup.

Joetex Frimpong

FORWARD 17.04.82
Al Nasr (Sau)
9 caps (0 goals)



Top scorer in Nigeria two seasons running with Enyimba and winner of African Champions League crowns in 2003 and 2004. Loaned to Al Nasr in February. Turned down an approach by Nigeria to play for their Olympic team two years ago; Ghana then stepped in to hand him a first cap.

Asamoah Gyan

FORWARD 22.11.85
Modena (Ita)
10 caps (7 goals)



Scored five goals for Ghana last year, three of them in the World Cup qualifiers but was then ruled out of the Nations Cup by injury. An aggressive striker who is on loan at Serie B Modena from top-flight Udinese.

Prince Tagoe

FORWARD 09.11.86
Al Ittihad (Sau)
4 caps (0 goals)



The teenager surprisingly turned down a move to German side Mainz in January, signing instead for Asian champions Al Ittihad. He has already been among the goals there, and was previously top scorer at ex-Ghanaian champions Hearts of Oak.

HOLLAND

Anyone's guess



KLAAS-JAN DROPPERT
IN THE HAGUE

The unpredictable coach, inexperienced squad and tough group make it hard to assess the *Oranje's* chances

IN THE PAST, Holland have been rated among the favourites to win the World Cup, at least by themselves. And they have often gone a long way – finalists in 1974 and 1978, quarter-finalists in 1994 and fourth in 1998.

But this time it is far more difficult to predict where the Dutch stand in international football. Despite lying third in the FIFA rankings, Holland are definitely not one of the big guns. A tough group, an inexperienced squad and a coach who makes unpredictable decisions will give bookmakers a hard job assessing Holland's real strength.

At least the coach, Marco Van Basten, is aware of the situation, saying: "We are less experienced than the so-called big countries – these teams are ahead of us. We have a fair chance of making a good account of ourselves only if everything goes according to plan."

The truth is that Van Basten is building a new team that should peak at Euro 2008 and does not see the World Cup as a reason to change this strategy. He showed this in the most recent friendly

against Ecuador in March, when seven of the 13 players used had fewer than 10 caps.

That is not to say Van Basten is not gearing up for the Germany finals. The coach is aiming to use the preparation period after the club season to gel his players into a strong team, that, despite its relative rawness, can play the traditional Dutch 4-3-3 style by dominating matches with attacking and attractive football. He will use the positive atmosphere among the players to try to deliver a team that could be the tournament's dark horse.

Group of Death

But the odds are not in Van Basten's favour. Trying to survive the so-called Group of Death, with Argentina, Serbia & Montenegro and Africa's best team, Ivory Coast, is hardly an easy start.

However, if the *Oranje* do reach the next round, their chances increase because potential opponents Mexico or Portugal do seem beatable.

The coach's biggest worry will be the physical condition of his team. Some of his squad have played an entire season for the first time, which is why he was not particularly pleased with the FA's introduction of end-of-season play-offs for the domestic League.

Much will depend on the fitness of players such as Edwin Van der Sar, Phillip Cocu, Ruud Van Nistelrooy and Arjen Robben. If one of these key men is missing or out of form, Holland hardly have decent alternatives.

The fans, who have embraced the national team again after Van Basten took over, have other worries. More than 180,000 supporters have applied to attend Holland's games, but only 18,000 will cross the border with tickets.

With the tournament approaching, the feeling of optimism will grow.

But guessing Holland's chances correctly remains a tough job, even for the country's best pundits.

'We are less experienced than the so-called big countries – they are ahead of us'

Marco Van Basten



Driving force...Mark Van Bommel gets a Dutch attack going in the March friendly against Ecuador

'I always want to win, but I'm not afraid to lose'

THE COACH: Marco Van Basten

How do you feel your team-building has gone?

After Euro 2004 a lot of players ended their international careers, so we had to pick new young replacements, and that wasn't easy. Our focus then was on the 2008 European Championship, but things have gone so well that we are now able to play at the World Cup finals. But it's not fair to expect too much from them at this stage.

Why have you chosen to omit players such as Clarence Seedorf?

A few players became unavailable because they didn't want to play for the national team any more and a

few we didn't select because we thought that was best for the team. For example, we thought we had some players ready to come in who were better for the team as a whole than maybe some more famous names, even if they had much more experience.

So ego has to take second place to team spirit?

For me it's very important that a player performs only for the team and not for his personal interest. It's the only way a country like Holland can play an important role at a major tournament, because we are not Brazil or Argentina, who have so many quality players and can lean on two or three big names. We have to



try to match them with overall quality and teamwork.

Is it important to keep a sense of fun in football?

It's not the most important thing but it's one of them. You start out in football because you like playing the game. But

SCHEDULE

MAY 21-26 Training camp in Lausanne, Switzerland
MAY 27 Holland v Cameroon (Rotterdam)
MAY 29-JUNE 4 Training camp in Hoenderloo
JUNE 1 Holland v Mexico (Eindhoven)
JUNE 4 Holland v Australia (Rotterdam)
JUNE 6 Squad travel to World Cup base – the Parkhotel Adler in Hinterzarten in the Black Forest

WORLD CUP GROUP C

JUNE 11 Holland v Serbia & Montenegro (Leipzig)
JUNE 16 Holland v Ivory Coast (Stuttgart)
JUNE 21 Holland v Argentina (Frankfurt)

if you think only about winning, you put yourself under too much pressure. It's vital that you have clear and positive ideas about what you want to achieve and how you get there because, if things go well, then you will get the right results – and that's the way you should approach football.

What do you think of your World Cup group?

It's very interesting. Serbia & Montenegro, just like the old Yugoslavia, have good technique, with players who can be tough and even ruthless, but within the laws. They qualified having

conceded only one goal, so they will make it difficult for us. Ivory Coast lost the African Nations Cup Final only on penalties and have some great players. Argentina, our last opponents, have lots of great players such as Leo Messi, whom I like very much. If we are playing well and we happen to lose against opponents for whom a star player such as Messi or Thierry Henry or Ronaldinho makes the difference then I can live with that. I can shake his hand at the final whistle. I always want to win... but I am not afraid to lose.

Interview by Keir Radnedge

'Every point in our group will be vital'

THE PLAYER: Phillip Cocu

Many of your team-mates retired from the national team after Euro 2004.

Why did you stay on?

It crossed my mind to retire but I decided to wait to see what the situation was with the national team. When Marco Van Basten was appointed coach, with his ideas, I knew I wanted to be part of the next generation. Returning to the Dutch League [from Barcelona] with PSV has also played a major part. Combining the national team with playing in La Liga would have been too tough.

What has changed under Van Basten?

Obviously, more players

have come into consideration, players with less experience. But the atmosphere hasn't changed. It has always been good since I've been part of the squad, with the exception of Euro 96, of course, when there were ructions.

What is Van Basten's vision?

He wants us to play in a typically Dutch style, which means having as much possession as possible, a good build-up from the back, having numbers in midfield and trying to reach the forwards with combination football. Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't. We've got a young squad so it takes some time to do it properly,

but we will do better once the final 23 can work together. Van Basten hasn't been a coach for a long time, but he knows what he wants and is able to explain his gameplan. He communicates well with every player.

So far Holland haven't played in the dominant, attractive way Van Basten wants.

That's true, we have to do much better, but it's impossible to dominate for 90 minutes. But if we get as much possession as possible, our opponents will get fewer opportunities. So it's important to read the game and take the right decisions. But domination all depends on

form, and if you haven't got it, you should try a different way. During the qualifiers this team showed they will fight for each other and get a good result.

What do you expect from the World Cup?

I hope we win it. We aren't among the favourites, and that is an advantage for our young squad.

Holland are in a tough group.

Absolutely. We can't afford to make mistakes because every point in this group will be vital. These are three opponents with different styles, but the differences are slim. It all depends on who performs best on the day.



Is this your last World Cup?

Yes, I will finish my international career in Germany. It's time for others to take over. Whether I will play my last professional game at the World Cup, I don't know. It depends on what happens at PSV, who the new coach is and what the squad is like.

Interview by Klaas-Jan Droppert



TACTICS

HOLLAND WILL PLAY a traditional 4-3-3, but there is a difference to Marco Van Basten's system to that used by Louis Van Gaal, one of his predecessors as Holland coach and now at AZ Alkmaar. Van Gaal always plays with a No 10, an attack-minded player behind the strikers, and with a libero moving into midfield when the team has possession. Van Basten, educated in Serie A under coaches such as Arrigo Sacchi and Fabio Capello, prefers to have a controlling midfielder in the heart of the team and is more interested in his defenders marking well than in their build-up qualities.

In goal, Edwin Van der Sar is the unassailable No 1 and the leader of the defence. The full-backs – Jan Kromkamp (right) and Giovanni Van Bronckhorst (left) – will get forward when possible and, indeed, aren't natural defenders. Of the two centre-backs, Khalid Boulahrouz and Barry Opdam, the latter is the more likely to begin building moves.

Central midfielder Phillip Cocu is Van Basten's linchpin and important for the balance of the team. On the right side, Denny Landzaat will be preferred to Mark Van Bommel because of his defensive qualities. On the left, Rafael Van der Vaart has an attacking role and is allowed to cut inside and play in behind the central striker, Ruud Van Nistelrooy. Dirk Kuyt will play on the right up front in the absence of Salomon Kalou, with Arjen Robben on the left. Both wide men have a responsibility to create danger by providing crosses and putting in shots on goal.

Marco Van Basten

COACH 13.10.64

One of the world's best strikers in the 1980s and 90s but injury forced him to retire at 28. Took charge of Holland in July 2004 with little coaching experience – assistant with Ajax reserves – but led them undefeated through the World Cup qualifiers. Has neglected overseas-based players with "movie-star" attitudes. Johan Cruyff is his main adviser.

Maarten Stekelenburg

GOALKEEPER 22.09.82
Ajax
1 cap (0 goals)

In the squad to gain experience as future successor to Van der Sar, but he is injury-prone and looks uncertain at times. Rowed with Rafael Van der Vaart last season because the latter switched his wedding to the same day as Stekelenburg's, meaning Ajax players could not attend both.

Henk Timmer

GOALKEEPER 03.12.71
AZ Alkmaar
1 cap (0 goals)

A reliable understudy to Van der Sar and one of the key men of AZ's successful 2004-05 season. His girlfriend is Marianne Timmer (no relation), the 1,000 metres Olympic speedskating champion.

Edwin Van der Sar

GOALKEEPER 29.10.70
Manchester United (Eng)
107 caps (0 goals)

Team captain who was outstanding during the qualifiers, keeping his cool in an otherwise inexperienced defence. Has benefited from his move from Fulham to Manchester United last summer. Closing in on Frank De Boer's Dutch record 112 caps. Among the world's best footballing keepers.

Khalid Boulahrouz

DEFENDER 28.12.81
Hamburg (Ger)
10 caps (0 goals)

Tight marker who's nicknamed The Cannibal for his desire to polish off opponents. Spurs boss Martin Jol criticised his fitness when both were at RKC Waalwijk, saying it was "equal to a policeman's". The defender took heed and earned a move to Hamburg and a Holland call-up.

Tim De Cler

DEFENDER 08.11.78
AZ Alkmaar
2 caps (0 goals)

Attack-minded reserve left-back who was offloaded to AZ from Ajax four years ago after being deemed not good enough. Like Van Bronckhorst, he lacks defensive ability.

Nigel De Jong

DEFENDER 30.11.84
Hamburg (Ger)
10 caps (0 goals)

Offers cover for several positions. A defensive midfielder for Hamburg, whom he joined in the winter after seeing too much of the bench at Ajax, but more likely to be used as a right-back or right midfielder by Van Basten. Father Jerry won three caps in the 1980s as a defender.

Jan Kromkamp

DEFENDER 17.08.80
Liverpool (Eng)
8 caps (0 goals)

Attack-minded right-back who joined Villarreal last summer after a great season with AZ but failed to adapt to Spain. Now at Liverpool, but is again often on the bench. Van Basten has criticised his club choices and said he should focus more on football than the Dutch newspaper column he writes.

Joris Mathijsen

DEFENDER 05.04.80
AZ Alkmaar
5 caps (0 goals)

A good marker and strong in the air, he is one of the best defenders in Holland, though his build-up play could be better. Could even get one of the starting central defensive places. A key member of the AZ team last season but missed the latter stages because of a severe knee injury.

Barry Opdam

DEFENDER 27.02.76
AZ Alkmaar
7 caps (1 goal)

Made his Holland debut last June at the age of 29 after impressing with AZ. A sober, solid defender who is strong in the air and passes well. Lacks pace, however. Struggling this season at club level, and AZ coach Louis Van Gaal often keeps him on the bench.

Giovanni Van Bronckhorst

DEFENDER 05.02.75
Barcelona (Spa)
55 caps (3 goals)

Former midfielder who loves to get forward from left-back and, since he is not really a defender, struggles when up against a right-winger. Often only makes the Barcelona bench, but is a first-choice with Holland because there are no alternatives. Of Moluccan descent.

Phillip Cocu

MIDFIELDER 29.10.70
PSV Eindhoven
95 caps (10 goals)

Heart and soul of the team and one of the few of his generation to continue playing for Holland after Euro 2004. Van Basten's linchpin in midfield but can also play as libero or on the left wing. Renowned for his consistency and ability to read the game well.

Edgar Davids

MIDFIELDER 13.03.73
Tottenham (Eng)
74 caps (6 goals)

Surinam-born midfielder nicknamed Pitbull and also Piranha for his aggressive, ball-winning playing style. Stripped of the captaincy and neglected by Van Basten for a long time because he hardly played at Internazionale. Moved to Spurs to try to keep alive his World Cup hopes.

Denny Landzaat

MIDFIELDER 06.05.76
AZ Alkmaar
20 caps (1 goal)

Central or right-sided midfielder who is one of Van Basten's key players in the newly-built team and will probably deny Clarence Seedorf a squad place. Reliable, does his defensive duties well and is also a solid penalty taker, but he should take more initiative. Another player of Moluccan descent.

Hedwiges Maduro

MIDFIELDER 13.02.85
Ajax
9 caps (0 goals)

Provides cover for the right and central midfield positions and is a good reader of the game. Made his Holland debut after just 185 minutes in the first team at Ajax. His name means "mature warrior" in a language spoken in the Dutch Antilles, where his parents are from.

Wesley Sneijder

MIDFIELDER 09.06.84
Ajax
21 caps (5 goals)

Two-footed player in good form for Ajax who will understudy for friend Van der Vaart on the left of midfield. Had a phenomenal rise to prominence in 2003 and was the star of the Euro 2004 qualifying play-off second leg against Scotland. Not a fan favourite because of his perceived arrogance.

Mark Van Bommel

MIDFIELDER 22.04.77
Barcelona (Spa)
34 caps (7 goals)

Dynamic midfielder who should be a key player for Holland but doesn't see eye to eye with Van Basten. According to the coach, Van Bommel tends to neglect his defensive duties and does not carry out his orders. Missed Euro 2004 because of injury, making this his first major tournament.

Rafael Van der Vaart

MIDFIELDER 11.02.83
Hamburg (Ger)
35 caps (6 goals)

Reached a dead end at Ajax but now blossoming at Hamburg, where he plays behind the strikers. That is not an option with Holland, but he still manages to create danger by cutting in from the left wing. Wife Silvie Meis, a TV personality, is expecting their first child during the finals.

Romeo Castelen

FORWARD 03.05.83
Feyenoord
8 caps (1 goal)

Lively Surinam-born right-winger who has good pace but needs to improve his crossing and his physical strength. When he was six, his mother died in a plane crash in which several Dutch players of Surinam origin also died. Came to Amsterdam after his father's death and was raised by his sisters.

Dirk Kuyt

FORWARD 22.07.80
Feyenoord
16 caps (4 goals)

Strong, hard-working striker who will play on the right wing although he is naturally a centre-forward. Son of a fisherman from the coastal village of Katwijk, but decided to become a decorator rather than a fisherman because he would be free on Saturdays to play for his local amateur team.

Robin Van Persie

FORWARD 08.08.83
Arsenal (Eng)
7 caps (1 goal)

Enfant terrible at Feyenoord but has become more professional at Arsenal under the wing of mentor Dennis Bergkamp. Plays in midfield for the Gunners, but is reserve for left-winger Robben with Holland. Has splendid technique but needs to control his temper.

Jan Vennegoor of Hesselink

FORWARD 11.07.78
PSV Eindhoven
6 caps (0 goals)

Holland's own Peter Crouch. But while his height makes him good in the air he lacks pace and mobility and has failed to score for Holland in six attempts. Played at Twente Enschede for five years before moving to PSV in 2001.

Also in contention

Full-backs probably have the best chance of breaking into the finals 23. Right-back **KEW JALIENS** (15.09.78; AZ Alkmaar; 1 cap, 0 goals) is a tight marker who can also play in central defence, while young **URBY EMANUELSON** (16.06.86; Ajax; 0 caps) is actually a midfielder but is pushing for inclusion as a left-back after breaking through in that position at club level.

In central defence the fringe contenders are veteran **ANDRE OIJER** (11.07.74; PSV Eindhoven; 17 caps, 2 goals), who can also play at right-back; injury-prone **JOHN HEITINGA** (15.11.83; Ajax; 16 caps, 1 goal); and **RON VLAAR** (16.02.85; Feyenoord; 2 caps, 0 goals), who dented his chances by making mistakes in the February friendly defeat against Italy. The diminutive but solid **SERGINHO GREENE** (24.06.82; Feyenoord; 0 caps) could also come into the reckoning, but has yet to make his debut.

Ghana-born **GEORGE BOATENG** (09.05.75; Middlesbrough, Eng; 4 caps, 0 goals) would provide cover for any position across the midfield.

KLAAS-JAN HUNTELAAR (12.08.83; Ajax; 0 caps), prolific at club level, is the third-choice central striker behind Van Nistelrooy and Kuyt, but could come into contention for a squad place if, as expected, Kuyt is switched to the right flank. **ROY MAKAAAY** (09.03.75; Bayern Munich, Ger; 43 caps, 6 goals) is now only fourth-choice striker since he doesn't fit in to Van Basten's 4-3-3 system.

Chances improved for right-winger **MARTIJN MEERDINK** (15.09.76; AZ Alkmaar; 1 cap, 0 goals) after the block was put on Salomon Kalou's fast-track passport application.

IRAN

Third time lucky?

The Iranians feel confident of getting through their group after the failures of 1978 and 1998

THE WORLD CUP is coming around quicker than usual for Iran. They have had to wait only eight years since their last qualification, in comparison to the 20-year gap between their first and second appearances (1978 and 1998).

The relative ease with which the team booked their ticket to Germany and the fact that they have

been in FIFA's top 20 for more than a year have raised expectations in the country. The media, including no fewer than 10 daily football papers, have been talking up the team's chances of reaching the last 16 for the first time.

But amid all the optimism, it's worth pointing out that Iran have not been tested by any of the top

footballing sides, apart from a friendly against Germany in Tehran 18 months ago, which the World Cup hosts won 2-0.

As in most traditional footballing nations, the game in Iran has its roots in the back alleys of the poorer neighbourhoods of the major cities. A version of three-a-side, played with a mini plastic ball and a couple of bricks as goalposts, still thrives.

European influences came to Iran in the 1970s in the shape of (mainly) British and Yugoslav coaches. The great challenge of harnessing the flair of the local players to tactical systems has been going on ever since, with varying degrees of success.

But despite the injection of European discipline, the public's love of skilful, individualist attacking styles remains. This "emotional football" has been the main reason for the current national side's unpredictability against stronger opposition. Although Iran produced some dazzling performances at the 2004 Asian Cup, where they finished third, they were far from convincing in the World Cup preliminaries. Even the fact that they qualified with a game to spare did not appease the critics.

Embarrassing results

The pressure on Croat coach Branko Ivankovic was hardly eased by embarrassments in two friendlies – a 3-0 defeat by English second level club QPR last July and a 2-1 home loss to a second-string Macedonia in November.

The match order at the finals has not been particularly kind to the Iranians. They would probably have preferred to meet underdogs Angola first, in the hope of securing three points to take into the games against Mexico and Portugal. Instead, they must nick a point or two from the two group favourites before meeting the Africans.

Some fans were disappointed with the draw because Iran were not drawn with one of the traditional footballing powers such as Brazil or England. But Group D still has enough to excite the millions of Iranian football fanatics inside and outside the country.

Ivankovic's main tactical concern will be the defence and, in particular, how to nullify Portugal and Mexico's star strikers. As far as attacking inspiration goes, a lot will be weighing on the shoulders of Ali Karimi. But with his flair, Vahid Hashemian's aerial power, Mehdi Mahdavia's crosses, Javad Nekounam's tackling and Ali Daei's experience, Iran are well-equipped to offer at least the hope of surprising a few people.



ADEL FERDOSIPOUR
IN TEHRAN



All for the cause...Mohamad Nosrati and his fellow defenders will be tested by Portugal and Mexico's strikers

'Emotional football has been the reason for the team's unpredictability against stronger opposition'

'Iran have great motivation to show their abilities'

THE COACH: Branko Ivankovic



Iran and Angola are the underdogs in Group D.

Yes. Mexico and Portugal are clear favourites. Mexico were brilliant at last year's Confederations Cup. They beat Brazil and only narrowly lost to hosts Germany. Portugal were runners-up at Euro 2004 and, considering that winners Greece are not at the World Cup, they could be considered the best European side in the finals. But being the favourites does not bring success. Teams such as Iran have great motivation to show their abilities. We believe in ourselves and will do our best to qualify for the next round.

Iran must play against opponents who all have different styles – Mexico with their Latin tradition, Portugal

with a mix of European style and Brazilian flair, and Angola, something of an unknown quantity. Do you feel well prepared for that?

Our programme of friendlies began last July. We've played two African sides – Togo and Libya; three from Europe – Bosnia, Azerbaijan and Macedonia; and Costa Rica from the CONCACAF region. We are also playing Croatia and Bosnia on the eve of the World Cup. So we are well prepared.

You led Iran to their 2002 Asian Games triumph and achieved third place at the 2004 Asian Cup. Also, Iran qualified easily for the World Cup. Despite all this, you have come in for much criticism.

SCHEDULE

MAY 28 Iran v Croatia (Osijek)
MAY 31 Iran v Bosnia-Herzegovina (Mashhad)
JUNE 4 Squad travel to World Cup base – the Ringhotel Krone on the edge of Friedrichshafen, near the Swiss border

WORLD CUP GROUP D

JUNE 11 Iran v Mexico (Nuremberg)
JUNE 17 Iran v Portugal (Frankfurt)
JUNE 21 Iran v Angola (Leipzig)

I don't understand it. I have been in charge for 28 official games, of which 22 were wins and we have lost only twice. The statistics speak for themselves.

The critics believe your team is too conservative.

What do they mean by conservative? We have always played attacking football, even against Bahrain, when we only needed a draw to qualify for the World Cup.

You haven't found your ideal left-back yet.

That's true. I have tried eight players in that position in the past four years, but only Sattar Zare and maybe Mohamad Nosrati have played to the required standard.

Finding a naturally left-footed player is not a simple task.

Ali Daei is leading your attack, but he's had his share of critics and he's now 37. Does he deserve his place for the full 90 minutes?

He is a leader. Daei and Vahid Hashemian are our best strikers. I have substituted him a few times, but even his defensive abilities are vital at some stages of a match.

What are your plans after the finals?

I don't know. It depends on many things. I have a contract until October 2006. I have lived away from my family for five years, and the daily routine of club football is tempting.

'Despite the political problems, we will be well prepared'

THE PLAYER: Ali Karimi

How do you rate the other teams in your group?

Portugal are one of the best teams in Europe, and Mexico were outstanding in last year's Confederations Cup. Nor will we underestimate Angola.

Iran have not been able to arrange friendlies against strong teams so far. Are warm-ups against Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina the best way to prepare for the World Cup?

Croatia have been one of the rising countries in recent years and have just beaten Argentina. Bosnia played

impressively in the qualifiers. Despite the political problems, we will be well prepared.

What are your team's strengths and weaknesses?

Technically, we are well equipped but we must work more on the physical side.

Aren't Iran too dependent on Europe-based players?

I agree that they are key players but in modern football you need 11 good players, so teamwork is important not individuals.

You and team-mates Mahdavia, Hashemian and Zandi play your club football in Germany. Does this give you an edge in the World Cup?

Well, we four are only part of the team. But, of course, for us it is a big help to know the stadiums, the nice people, the weather and the atmosphere.

How was your first season in the Bundesliga?

Honestly, I did not expect to play so many games. Before I got injured I started almost every game for Bayern.

Your dribbling skills were much admired during a four-year spell in UAE but at Bayern you are more conservative.

It all depends on the coach. Here in Germany I do not have that freedom to dribble past defenders. I've just tried to adjust myself to Bayern's style.

What is your favourite midfield role?

Just behind the strikers.





IRAN



TACTICS

BRANKO IVANKOVIC used a 4-2-3-1 formation from the word go, but the return of forward Vahid Hashemian to the international stage after a dispute prompted the coach to switch to 4-4-2.

Ebrahim Mirzapour is first-choice keeper, with Yahya Golmohammadi and Rahman Rezaei at the heart of the defence forming a commanding partnership. Hosein Kaebi is favourite to play at right-back and often helps launch attacks with his speedy surges forward. Right-footer Sattar Zare should get the nod at left-back because of his good man-marking abilities, though the more aggressive Mohamad Nosrati and Ali Reza Vahedi-Nikbakht will make Zare sweat on his place.

UAE-based defensive midfielder Javad Nekounam controls the tempo of the game and is a fierce tackler. The rest of midfield is made up of Bundesliga players. On the right, the influential Mehdi Mahdavia creates numerous assists with his excellent crosses. On the left, newcomer Ferydoon Zandi is also a creator of chances and a set-piece specialist, but has not quite slotted into Iran's style of play.

The most important player of all is Ali Karimi, whose flair and dribbling ability is a constant danger to defences. As a consequence, opponents often man-mark him, thus opening up space for Iran's other attackers.

Veteran forward Ali Daei is a prolific scorer and also team captain who has recently refound his form after a dip. His strike partner is Hashemian, who has magnificent aerial ability.

Branko Ivankovic

COACH 28.02.54



Ebrahim Mirzapour

GOALKEEPER

16.09.78
Foolad
62 caps (0 goals)



Good shot-stopper who has established himself as No 1 over the past five years and is generally reliable, but still not a popular choice among fans or the media. His large frame makes him a commanding presence and his footwork has improved in recent times.

Hassan Roudbarian

GOALKEEPER

06.07.78
Pas
1 cap (0 goals)



Inexperienced on the international stage, but a valuable substitute. Spent a number of seasons on the bench at Pas but once he got a first-team chance was a key factor in the club's run to the 2004 title. The squad intellectual, he studies psychology and history in his spare time.

Vahid Taleblou

GOALKEEPER

26.05.82
Esteghlal
1 cap (0 goals)



The lanky keeper broke into Esteghlal's first team at the age of 18 but it was still a surprise when he got such an early call-up to the national team. A good shot-stopper, and despite his fragile-looking frame is better at dealing with crosses than his rivals. Son of Iran's kit man.

Yahya Golmohammadi

DEFENDER

19.03.71
Saba Battery
65 caps (3 goals)



The veteran centre-back is a good reader of the game and times his tackles well. Became a national hero Gazza-style after crying following Iran's defeat by the Republic of Ireland in the 2002 World Cup qualifying play-offs.

Hosein Kaebi

DEFENDER

23.12.85
Foolad
42 caps (1 goal)



Diminutive but dynamic right-back who offers a great deal of pace going forward. Only 20 but has already played 42 games for the national team. Joined Al Sadd in Qatar last year after some unsuccessful trials in England. Now back in Iran but still eyeing a move to Europe.

Mohamad Nosrati

DEFENDER

11.01.82
Pas
42 caps (3 goals)



Scored the winner against Bahrain in the qualifying play-off, but earlier blunders meant he was not given hero status by the fans. The determined left-back has given improved performances recently, however, making him a serious contender for a starting slot.

Rahman Rezaei

DEFENDER

20.02.75
Messina (Ita)
41 caps (2 goals)



Tall, commanding central defender who was a little-known striker seven years ago, but proved a revelation after a change of position. Former national coach Miroslav Blazevic described him as his "bird from heaven" and used him regularly in the qualifiers for 2002.

Amir Hosein Sadeghi

DEFENDER

04.09.81
Esteghlal
0 caps



Uncapped left-footer with a poor disciplinary record but has come into the World Cup reckoning because he has been a key figure in Esteghlal's emergence as championship contenders. One for the future.

Sattar Zare

DEFENDER

27.01.82
Bargh
19 caps (0 goals)



Versatile defender who is a favourite of Ivankovic, though not the fans. Iran's lack of natural left-footers has prompted the coach to make Zare, a right-footer, his first-choice at left-back. Capable and determined in defensive mode, but not too creative going forward.

Mohamad Alavi

MIDFIELDER

29.01.82
Foolad
22 caps (2 goals)



Primarily a defensive midfielder but can also play in central defence. Has given some below-par performances for his club in recent months, but always looks assured for Iran, making it hard for Ivankovic to leave him out of the squad.

Mojtaba Jabari

MIDFIELDER

16.06.83
Esteghlal
5 caps (0 goals)



Indisputably the star of the domestic season after a run of excellent performances in central midfield for Esteghlal. That has also put him in the running for a starting place with Iran. His great vision and intelligent passing suggest a dream move to Spain could well be a possibility.

Ali Karimi

MIDFIELDER

08.11.78
Bayern Munich (Ger)
89 caps (32 goals)



Asian Player of the Year in 2004, and impressed in his first season in Europe after a spell in the UAE. Many believed he would not be able to show his dribbling skills in European football because of its more physical style but he has been in and around the Bayern first-team.

Javad Kazemian

MIDFIELDER

23.04.81
Pirouzi
26 caps (1 goal)



Attacking midfielder who was tipped to be the new Mahdavia after a fine showing at the Under-19 Asian Games and has been very impressive at club level, but inconsistency has cost him his place in the starting line-up of the senior national team.

Mehdi Mahdavia

MIDFIELDER

24.07.77
Hamburg (Ger)
89 caps (11 goals)



Scored in the famous 2-1 win against the USA at France 98 and has been a regular starter for Iran and Hamburg in the eight years since. Makes many assists for club and country, but has a mediocre scoring record. Private life revelations have hit the Iranian papers in recent weeks.

Moharram Navidkia

MIDFIELDER

01.11.82
Sepahan
23 caps (1 goal)



Recent inconsistency may well have cost him his starting place. Navidkia was the revelation of the 2003 League season and put in some memorable performances for Iran. But a move to Bochum in Germany did not work out, and he rejoined Sepahan on loan to keep his World Cup hopes alive.

Javad Nekounam

MIDFIELDER

07.09.80
Al Sharjah (UAE)
69 caps (12 goals)



Consistent defensive midfielder who has been an Iran regular for five years. His physical strength and commitment will be vital in Germany. In the UAE with Al Sharjah on a six-month contract, but eyeing a move to Europe after the finals.

Andranik Teimoorian

MIDFIELDER

06.03.83
Abu Moslem
4 caps (1 goal)



One of the domestic League's rising stars, and his versatility and combativeness mean he may see some action in Germany. From Iran's Armenian community, which has a strong footballing tradition.

Ali Reza Vahedi-Nikbakht

MIDFIELDER

30.06.80
Esteghlal
54 caps (12 goals)



Left-footer who was previously one of the national team's best players but his form has dipped over the past year and he looks set to lose his starting place to Zandi. However, "Niki" is also in the running to take the left-back slot.

Ferydoon Zandi

MIDFIELDER

26.04.79
Kaiserslautern (Ger)
9 caps (1 goal)



Only recently opted to play for Iran, with Germany the other possibility. Zandi's mother is German and Zandi grew up and now plays there. Despite the left-footer's late conversion and the fact he speaks little Farsi, the Persian language, he has become a favourite with Iran fans.

Also in contention

Veteran **KARIM BAGHERI** (20.02.72; Pirouzi; 80 caps, 47 goals) has given some impressive performances at club level in central defence, having formerly been a prolific goalscoring midfielder. However, he has probably not done enough to merit inclusion.

EMAN MOBALI (03.11.82; Al Shabab, UAE; 30 caps, 1 goal) is Iran's Beckham when it comes to set-pieces, and the little creative midfielder has many admirers. But coach Ivankovic has yet to be convinced. **HAMED KAVIANPOUR** (25.11.79; Pirouzi; 49 caps, 1 goal) was once one of the best midfielders in the Iranian League but has failed to refine his form after a cruciate ligament injury last year. Also had an unsuccessful spell in the UAE.

ALI SAMERE (23.11.77; Al Sha'ab, UAE; 21 caps, 2 goals) is a natural goalscorer with an impressive record for his unheralded UAE club and could well be close to inclusion. **KHODADAD AZIZI** (22.06.71; Rahahan; 47 caps, 11 goals) scored the goal against Australia that secured the national team's France 98 place. But he has failed to find his form since returning to the domestic league after spells in Germany, the USA and UAE. **REZA ENAYATI** (23.09.76; Esteghlal; 16 caps, 4 goals) has been league top scorer two seasons running but never quite convinced for Iran.

Siavash Akbarpour

FORWARD

21.01.85
Esteghlal
1 cap (0 goals)



Skilful forward with a great shot who has formed a lethal partnership with squad contender Reza Enayati at Esteghlal. Has a poor disciplinary record, however.

Arash Borhani

FORWARD

14.09.83
Pas
19 caps (7 goals)



Promising youngster with impressive speed but needs to improve his finishing. Has also suffered a dip in form at club level recently. A brilliant performer for the Olympic team and was a senior team regular for a while, but has lost out following Hashemian's return.

Ali Daei

FORWARD

21.03.69
Saba Battery
145 caps (109 goals)



Captain and the top international scorer in the world. Many believe the veteran is long past his best but his leadership qualities and experience will be priceless at the World Cup. If the speculation that Daei will retire after the finals is true, a goal or two would be a fitting end to a fine career.

Vahid Hashemian

FORWARD

21.07.76
Hannover (Ger)
28 caps (10 goals)



Boycotted the team for two years after a dispute with federation officials. Persuaded to return because of Iran's dearth of quality strikers and his impressive form for German club Bochum. Nicknamed The Helicopter because of his great aerial ability; also has a powerful shot.

ITALY

Champagne on ice

The *Azzurri* are unlikely to produce sparkling football but they have a competitiveness that could prove decisive

WHEN IT COMES to a World Cup, all Italy expects. Even if coach Marcello Lippi does not much like the observation (see interview), the fact is that most Italians feel anything less than a semi-final finish is a failure.

The excellent form shown by Lippi's side over the past 18 months has added to the weight of expectation. Italy comfortably qualified for the finals from a relatively easy group (Norway and Scotland were their strongest opponents) and then took the scalps of Holland and Germany in prestige friendlies last November and this March respectively.

The *Azzurri* were unbeaten in 16 games during the past year and a half, and their good form has, according to one opinion poll, convinced 48.3 per cent of Italians that their national team can make it to the Final in Berlin.

With reservations, the optimism is justified. Italy are certainly sure to be a tough, competitive unit. Under Lippi, they are unlikely to play champagne football, but they are equally unlikely to

reproduce the dismal, negative attitude they showed when making humiliating but deserved early exits from both the 2002 World Cup and Euro 2004.

For the Italy-bashers, for those who believe Italian football can never be anything other than negative, cynical and over-defensive, Lippi's side may come as a rude surprise. If things go to plan, the team may perform more like the Lippi-coached Juventus of the mid-1990s than the Italy of the past two major tournaments.

Reasonable blend

With such players as Gianluigi Buffon, Alessandro Nesta, Fabio Cannavaro and Gianluca Zambrotta in defence, Andrea Pirlo, Gennaro Gattuso and Mauro Camoranesi in midfield, and Luca Toni and Alberto Gilardino in attack, the side looks to be a reasonable blend of experience, craft and guile.

The reservations are linked to some obvious considerations. For a start, in away qualifying games against Slovenia, Norway and Scotland, Italy

drew twice and lost once (against Slovenia), giving performances that lacked personality. Does the recent good run mean the side have now found it?

Lippi's insistence on the group ethic and workrate means that the side will tend to grind it out rather than send up fireworks. Even if Real Madrid's Antonio Cassano effectively eliminated himself from the squad by his truculent behaviour before his departure from Roma, is there really no place for clever, creative little strikers such as David Di Michele, Marco Marchionni and Fabrizio Miccoli, or a midfielder like Stefano Fiore?

Thirdly, there is the draw. If Italy make their usual slow start, they will struggle to finish even second in a group that also comprises Ghana, the USA and the Czech Republic. And if they do finish second, the next stop, almost certainly, is Brazil.

It could be, however, that the draw might work in Italy's favour. Given the tough nature of the group and the desire to avoid Brazil up the road, minds might become wonderfully concentrated. That way, you make a good start, the bandwagon starts rolling, and who knows what may happen?

'If Italy make their usual slow start, they will struggle to even finish second in the group'



Never say die...Italy will need Gennaro Gattuso's fighting spirit at the heart of midfield



PADDY AGNEW
IN ROME

'We don't feel inferior to anyone'

THE COACH: Marcello Lippi

Many commentators argue that Italian football is still too defensive. Are we going to see more of the same in Germany?

I hope not, I hope that we continue to play in Germany as we did in the qualifying games and recent friendlies, taking our football to the opposition. Some foreign critics have too negative a view of Italian football. No top level Italian club, for example, play the old-style, man-marking game. Our football has evolved; if it had not, we would not continue to get good results in competitions such as the Champions League.

Do you agree with the popular view that anything less than a semi-final spot is a failure for Italy?

No, I don't like that

attitude; it's very negative. I think positive, I want my players to think positive, and we'll take what comes. We've qualified for the World Cup but that's the least we're expected to do. We've done well against big teams such as Holland and Germany. Wins like that help build confidence as you get towards the finals and, clearly, we don't feel inferior to anyone. But that's different from saying we feel we're stronger than everybody else.

How long will you wait to see if Francesco Totti is going to be fit for the finals?

I won't take a decision on him right until the very end. We're talking about a player of the class of Ronaldinho or Messi. As for his injury, he has been very positive, he hasn't complained.

Do you accept the view that players are burnt out when they get to the World Cup because they've just finished a tough league season?

I think the only thing that tires the players is reading every day how tired they will be when they get to the finals. Come on, we're talking about the World Cup, the greatest moment in a player's career. After 10 to 15 days of the right sort of training, they should be ready, they should be walking on air with the excitement and the honour of playing for their country at a World Cup.

Have you attempted any special approach in handling the national team?

I have tried to create a *gruppo*, a strong sense of team spirit, a club-like atmosphere within the squad.

SCHEDULE

MAY 22 Start of training camp at Coverciano, Florence
MAY 31 Italy v Switzerland (Geneva)
JUNE 2 Italy v Ukraine (Lausanne)
JUNE 3-4 Two-day break
JUNE 5 Training camp resumes at Coverciano
JUNE 7 Squad travel to World Cup base – the Landhaus Milser hotel in Duisburg

WORLD CUP GROUP E

JUNE 12 Italy v Ghana (Hanover)
JUNE 17 Italy v United States (Kaiserslautern)
JUNE 22 Italy v Czech Republic (Hamburg)

But I know, of course, that the tensions you have to handle playing for the national team are unlike tensions you get anywhere else in football.

Who are the favourites for the tournament?

Brazil are always the favourites, and my impression is that Brazilians like this; they'd be annoyed if they got to a World Cup and weren't the favourites because they like having the protagonist's role, they feel stronger with everyone saying they have to win.

Can you suggest a surprise team and player?



The surprise player will be Didier Zokora of Ivory Coast and the surprise side will be either Ukraine or Ivory Coast.

'We're a bit like Lippi's Juventus team of the 1990s'

THE PLAYER: Alberto Gilardino

How do you answer critics who continue to label Italian football as negative and too defensive?

Well, the current Italy side is the best example of how things have changed in Italian football. This team often plays with three men up front, we play an attacking game and one that calls for me and the other strikers to help out in midfield, too. It calls for the whole side to be involved all the time, and it is a long way from the old *catenaccio* label that people like to stick on us. Our team is a bit like Lippi's Juventus of the 1990s, it has that aggressive, assertive style.

You are one of a group of younger players brought into the side by Lippi. How much has this new wave helped form a true team identity?



It's true that Lippi has brought in new players, people such as myself, Luca Toni, Daniele De Rossi and Cristian Zaccardo, and that certainly helped him create his own team. But I would say that more than the younger players, our strongest point is Lippi himself. He has put together his own team, building it around a squad of players who play for each other. Right from our very first get-together, he made it clear that he wanted to create a club-like atmosphere, a team where players know one another, get on well together and play for each other. For example, right from the start,

all the experienced players, guys such as Nesta, Del Piero, Buffon, Cannavaro, were all a big help to me. They all made us younger players feel good immediately. We all do our best to talk as little as possible about our clubs when we turn up for Italy training. That's also what the boss wants us to do; he wants us only to concentrate on what we've got to do for Italy.

What was your reaction when you saw the group draw?

The first thing I did was to tease Marek Jankulovski, my Czech team-mate at Milan, telling him we would beat him. But, no, they're three

good teams, very competitive. I played against Ghana at the Athens Olympics and know how strong they are; they have players that we know well in Italy such as Appiah and Muntari. The USA are a good, serious team. As for the Czechs, they have players all over Europe's top leagues, and we all know how good they are. People say they are in decline, but I don't believe it.

What are Italy's chances?

We always go into a tournament like this under a lot of pressure, but we've just got to try not to think about it, take it one game at a time and then we'll see how far we go.



TACTICS

AT THEIR BEST, Marcello Lippi's Italy play in the mould of his Juventus teams. In other words, this is a side that try to take the game to their opponents, using a hard-running, aggressive gameplan, with a formation that can vary from 4-4-2 to 4-3-3 and even 4-3-1-2 (Francesco Totti is the "1").


Much will depend on Totti. If he's fit, the game rotates around him. Lippi usually asks him to play in a "No 10" role behind two out-and-out strikers, Luca Toni and Alberto Gilardino. This line-up requires increased workrate from the front men and the midfield trio of Mauro Camoranesi, Andrea Pirlo and Gennaro Gattuso. The set-up can also cause a dangerous imbalance since only one of the six players – Gattuso – is a serious defender. To that end, Lippi may bring on Simone Barone or Simone Perrotta to shore up his midfield.

If Totti is unavailable, Lippi may look to either Pirlo or Alessandro Del Piero to replace him. If it's Del Piero, it would probably be in a left-sided midfield role in which he'd have the freedom to cut inside and try to create for Toni and Gilardino. If it's Pirlo, he would be moved forward from his deep-lying central midfield position to play behind the strikers, with Daniele De Rossi taking Pirlo's normal role.

Keeper Gianluigi Buffon, central defenders Fabio Cannavaro and Alessandro Nesta, and left-back Gianluca Zambrotta all seem certain starters. Cristiano Zaccardo is apparent first-choice for right-back but could be piped by Massimo Oddo or even Zambrotta. If the latter gets the nod, Fabio Grosso would come in at left-back.

Marcello Lippi


COACH 11.04.48



Tactically shrewd coach who works as hard on his team's mental approach as on their physical preparation. Took the Italy reins in July 2004 after a decade of success at club level – won five Serie A titles and a Champions League in two spells at Juventus – and has invested much energy in attempting to create what he calls a "club spirit" in the Azzurri camp.

Marco Amelia


GOALKEEPER 02.04.82
Livorno
1 cap (0 goals)



Part of the Under-21 side that won the European Championship two years ago and has had an excellent season with Livorno.

Gianluigi Buffon


GOALKEEPER 28.01.78
Juventus
58 caps (0 goals)



With a discus-thrower for a mother, a weightlifter for a father, and a Milan and Italy goalkeeper for an uncle, Buffon was bred to do the business. A commanding figure in his area, quick off his line and positionally sound. Not so good on crosses. "Gigi" is an easygoing, popular character.

Angelo Peruzzi


GOALKEEPER 16.02.70
Lazio
31 caps (0 goals)



Built like a brick wall, Peruzzi is considered by many to be the best Italian keeper of the past decade, and his outstanding form with Lazio this season has earned him a national team recall. A very good back-up to Buffon.

Andrea Barzagli


DEFENDER 08.05.81
Palermo
7 caps (0 goals)



One of the new entries since Lippi took charge. Although Barzagli is some way short of the class and experience of Cannavaro and Nesta, he is nonetheless a better central defensive reserve than Materazzi.

Fabio Cannavaro


DEFENDER 13.09.73
Juventus
91 caps (1 goal)



Hallmark of excellence for the best part of a decade. Not big for a central defender, but the Neapolitan's timing, positioning and reading of the game more than compensate for that. Has just had a superb season with Juventus. Formerly a ball boy at Napoli in the Maradona era.

Fabio Grosso


DEFENDER 28.11.77
Palermo
15 caps (0 goals)



If Lippi needs to move Zambrotta up to midfield or puts him at right-back, then Grosso is a useful replacement at left-back. More effective attacking than defending, he can put in excellent crosses. Has a good understanding with Luca Toni, with whom he spent a season at Palermo.

Marco Materazzi

DEFENDER 19.08.73
Internazionale
26 caps (0 goals)



The bad boy of Italian football has a tendency to take the man and not the ball. That is one reason why all Italians hope Nesta and Cannavaro remain fit during the finals. Not up to the standard of previous central defensive reserves.

Alessandro Nesta


DEFENDER 19.03.76
Milan
73 caps (0 goals)



The Rome-born central defender has been criticised this season as Milan have looked vulnerable, especially at set-pieces. But he and Cannavaro remain fundamental to the team, and there are no suitable replacements.

Massimo Oddo


DEFENDER 14.06.76
Lazio
18 caps (0 goals)



Hard-working, solid right-back but can struggle against real pace on the flanks. Gets in good crosses when venturing forward and also has a powerful long-range shot.

Cristian Zaccardo


DEFENDER 21.12.81
Palermo
11 caps (1 goal)



Right-back introduced under Lippi, who has stuck with him despite a below-par performance in the 1-1 qualifying draw away to Scotland last September. Quick and adaptable, Zaccardo personifies the Lippi player-mould – more competitive than inspired. May well start.

Gianluca Zambrotta


DEFENDER 19.02.77
Juventus
52 caps (1 goal)



Quiet, understated left-back but arguably has been both Juve's and Italy's most important player in recent seasons. Has always been impressive going forward and can also play in wide midfield as well as at right-back.

Simone Barone


MIDFIELDER 30.04.78
Palermo
12 caps (1 goal)



Another member of the Azzurri's "Palermo Platoon" who will be a reserve for central midfield. The Parma youth team product first made waves with the Flying Donkeys of Chievo. A key player in Palermo's competitive outfit for the past two seasons.

Mauro Camoranesi


MIDFIELDER 04.10.76
Juventus
19 caps (0 goals)



The Italo-Argentine right-sided midfielder is part of a tradition that goes back to Italy's victorious 1934 World Cup side, when three Argentinians of Italian origins – Orsi, Monti and Guaita – were drafted into the team. Temperamental but talented.

Daniele De Rossi

MIDFIELDER 24.07.83
Roma
15 caps (3 goals)



Central midfielder who had a stunning debut when scoring after just four minutes in Italy's opening qualifier, a 2-1 win over Norway. A good passer, tough defensively and a regular goalscorer, the nearest thing the current squad have to Marco Tardelli.

Aimar Diana


MIDFIELDER 02.01.78
Sampdoria
11 caps (0 goals)



Right-sided midfielder who may well get the nod for a squad place ahead of more creative types such as Marco Marchionni and Mauro Esposito because he plays the sort of hard-running, covering game favoured by Lippi. Also manages to get forward and score, at least at club level.

Gennaro Gattuso


MIDFIELDER 09.01.78
Milan
40 caps (1 goal)



Every team should have one. "The Snarl" has to be an automatic first-choice selection since his passion and commitment, not to mention his redoubtable defensive work, are second to none. On top of that, he has been scoring goals in Serie A this season.

Simone Perrotta


MIDFIELDER 17.09.77
Roma
22 caps (1 goal)



A revelation this season; such has been his form as an attacking midfielder for Roma, who played many games without a recognised striker, that Lippi could well give him a starting berth. Until this season, Perrotta looked a player more of quantity than quality. Not now.

Andrea Pirlo


MIDFIELDER 19.05.79
Milan
22 caps (1 goal)



Another key player in the Lippi scheme of things. Pirlo is Italy's playmaker, taking the same deep-lying role he fills at Milan and a role that may become all the more crucial should Totti not recover in time for the finals. Also the team's No 1 free-kick taker.

Alessandro Del Piero

FORWARD 09.11.74
Juventus
72 caps (25 goals)



Class is not water, Italians say, and there have been lots of opportunities to say it this term as *Il Pinturicchio* (named after the Renaissance artist) has shown some of his old skills. Not the wonder boy of the mid-1990s, but his form, experience and free-kick expertise earn him his place.

Also in contention

MORGAN DE SANCTIS (26.03.77; Udinese; 2 caps, 0 goals) has had two excellent seasons at club level and is a possible for the third keeper spot.

Versatile defender **DANIELE BONERA** (31.05.81; Parma; 10 caps, 0 goals) has been regularly used by Lippi either in central defence or at right-back. Tough, hard-running left-back **GIORGIO CHIellini** (14.08.84; Juventus; 5 caps, 0 goals) would get the call only if Zambrotta or Grosso were injured. Left-back **MANUEL PASQUAL** (13.03.82; Fiorentina; 1 cap, 0 goals) has been one of the revelations of the League season.


The experienced but injury-plagued **MASSIMO AMBROSINI** (29.05.77; Milan; 22 caps, 0 goals) would provide good cover for the defensive midfield role. The creative, adaptable **STEFANO FIORE** (17.04.75; Fiorentina; 38 caps, 2 goals) has come back into the reckoning after a good season. Perhaps not combative enough for Lippi's tastes.

MANUEL BLASI (17.08.80; Juventus; 8 caps, 0 goals) is a hard-working midfielder who can also double up at right-back. He lacks playing time at Juve, however.

At his best, **CHRISTIAN VIERI** (12.07.73; Monaco, Fra; 49 caps, 23 goals) would be a first-choice striker, but injuries and age appear to have caught up with him. **VINCENZO IACQUINTA** (21.11.79; Udinese; 11 caps, 0 goals) has had a miserable season while major rival Toni has gone from strength to strength. **DAVID DI MICHELE** (06.01.76; Palermo; 3 caps, 0 goals) is a nippy little player who has done well since joining Palermo in January.

Alberto Gilardino


FORWARD 05.07.82
Milan
13 caps (5 goals)



Hardly deserves to start up front alongside Toni after a less-than-convincing season with Milan. But Lippi may well stick with him, hoping to revitalise a player who, at his best, is a lethal finisher and also holds up the ball well.

Filippo Inzaghi

FORWARD 09.08.73
Milan
48 caps (21 goals)



"SuperPippo" is nothing if not the old dog for the hard road. Curiously loathed by the Anglo-Saxon world, he remains one of the great poachers of the modern game, with a true striker's anticipation, speed of thought and goal sense. Written off a year ago but has made an effective comeback.

Luca Toni


FORWARD 26.05.77
Fiorentina
16 caps (7 goals)



"Toni-Gol" has had a stupendous season with Fiorentina, with a League high 28 goals with three games to play. His frame – 6ft 4in and 13st 8lb – allows him to put himself about a bit, he works hard and is good in the air and on the ground, though he misses as many chances as he scores.

Francesco Totti

FORWARD 27.09.76
Roma
49 caps (8 goals)



While Italy holds its breath and hopes for a fully fit Totti in Germany, it has to be said that for all the talent of Italy's No 1 star, he has yet to do the business on the big stage. If he does get to Germany, he will have much to prove, not to mention the weight of the nation riding on his Roman shoulders.

IVORY COAST



Jump to it...Arouna Kone, Arthur Boka and Didier Drogba hope for a victory dance in Germany

Elephants lead the way

The Ivorians are Africa's best hope of reaching the quarter-finals

IVORY COAST may be World Cup debutants but their achievement in seeing off the challenge of Cameroon and Egypt in the qualifiers, their runners-up finish at the African Nations Cup earlier this year, and the strong individual performances of key players at club level this season make them the continent's biggest hope at this summer's finals.

Henri Michel's side have enough quality to

suggest that they could actually emulate Cameroon in 1990 and Senegal in 2002 in reaching the quarter-finals.

That is a tough challenge, and the hardest part would be getting out of a group that also contains Argentina, Holland and Serbia & Montenegro.

The Ivorians certainly upset the formbook in the qualifiers, when Cameroon were the favourites, and

in fact the west Africans only made it to the finals because Pierre Wome missed a penalty for Cameroon in the last minute of their final group match against Egypt.

But Ivory Coast showed their World Cup qualification was no fluke when reaching the Nations Cup Final and taking Egypt, the hosts, all the way to penalties.

It was a good team effort from a side whose collective quality is a lot stronger than any of the other four African World Cup finalists.

Up front, the Elephants have the goalscoring acumen of Chelsea's Didier Drogba, but there are plenty of other quality players, including Arsenal defensive duo Kolo Toure and Emmanuel Eboue, highly-rated Saint-Etienne defensive midfielder Didier Zokora, PSG forward Bonaventure Kalou and young PSV striker Arouna Kone, who has the potential to be one of the finds of the finals.

Unfulfilled potential

Ivorian football has consistently produced stars over the decades, but collectively the national team have rarely fulfilled their potential. Ivory Coast have won the Nations Cup just once, in 1992, and although they have come close to World Cup qualification in the past, the feeling is they should have reached the finals sooner given the country's relative economic prosperity and political stability over the years.

The irony is that now the country is racked by civil conflict, essentially borne out of the animosity between the southerners, mainly indigenous Christians, and a large Muslim population in the north, many of whom are immigrants originally encouraged to come to the country to work in agriculture.

The team includes players from both sides of the divide, but Drogba surprised many at the Nations Cup by refusing to talk of the team as an instrument for peace and change. Instead, he said their priority was to win football matches, and that if peace was a by-product then that was a positive.

And while the Ivorians' success has not unified the country, it is helping to defuse tension and is a welcome distraction from the drudgery of life.

Drogba has become an icon for the country, and much will depend on his accuracy. Zokora should gain many admirers, and Toure is maturing fast into a world-class defender.

But the Ivorians carry a heavy burden as an attentive Africa waits and hopes.



MARK GLEESON

'The Ivorians' success has not unified the country, but it is helping to defuse tension'

'My boys are dying to be let off the leash'

THE COACH: Henri Michel



How do you view your group?

I had mixed emotions at the draw. Part of me was thrilled by the prospect of meeting top quality teams such as Holland and Argentina. At the same time, I was hit by the realisation that

we were in the most difficult group of all. We face a huge challenge but one we can definitely rise to. One thing is for sure: there's going to be some great football.

A few words on your opponents?

When you talk about World Cup favourites, Argentina have to be placed in the very top bracket along with Brazil, France, England and Italy. In Riquelme, Tevez, Messi, Aimar and Crespo, the Argentinians have a wealth of extraordinary talent in the attacking third, players who are genuine match-winners. Holland coach Marco Van Basten has introduced a lot of promising youngsters and can still count on the experience and ability

of Van Nistelrooy up front and Van der Sar in goal. Serbia & Montenegro don't play with the same artistry of the old Yugoslavia but form an extremely compact unit that is hard to break down.

So how will you qualify for the next round?

I look at our creative players and forwards and I can't help but be excited. Didier Drogba, Aruna Dindane and Bonaventure Kalou, to name just three, have the ability to embarrass any defence. Another factor in our favour is the invaluable experience the vast majority of the squad have acquired with elite clubs in Europe. Also, this is our first World Cup finals. The boys are dying to be let off

the leash in Germany and make their mark. I'm confident we will explode into life.

Critics keep on about Ivory Coast making it to the World Cup only because of Pierre Wome's penalty miss for Cameroon against Egypt in their last qualifier. Does that annoy you?

Absolutely. I had the impression people were questioning our right to go to Germany. Yes, we did lose twice to Cameroon but the fact is that we were on top of our group for nine of the 10 matches. As far as I'm concerned justice was done. We fully deserved to qualify.

Why is Ivorian football flourishing at the moment?

The federation has done great work putting in place the structures to spot and develop young players. We are one of the few African countries to have an organised youth league. What's more, the academy set up in Abidjan by my old France team-mate Jean-Marc Guillou has been an immense success, producing large quantities of technically able young players. Great players have always come out of the Ivory Coast; I'm thinking of Laurent Pokou in the 1970s, and Youssouf Fofana and my late assistant Mama Ouattara in the 1980s. But now the footballing infrastructure is much better and so many youngsters are getting the right coaching.

Interview by Nick Bidwell

'Drogba lifts the side, but we're not a one-man show'

THE PLAYER: Kolo Toure

How do you think Ivory Coast will fare at the World Cup?

There will be less pressure on us compared to other teams, and maybe that will help us in our matches in a tough group. No one should doubt the spirit in our squad. We thrive on adversity and I believe we will prove we deserved to qualify for the finals. We want to prove that Ivory Coast belongs with the top football nations, and we want to leave the tournament with our heads held high.

How much of a boost was it to reach the Final of the African Nations Cup?

That was very important to us. It proved that we are a good team and deserve to be in Germany. It also showed we are going to represent Africa well at the World Cup. We have a young side with an average age of 25, and to perform well enough to get to the Final was a fantastic experience for us. Success always increases your self-belief.

Didier Drogba is probably your highest-profile player. How important is he to the squad?

Drogba is a great striker and he has been a consistent goalscorer for us. He lifts the

side with his strength and his character. But people should not believe that we are just a one-man show. We are truly a team – and a team that I believe is improving all the time.

How important is it for Ivory Coast to play at a World Cup?

Playing in the tournament will be fabulous for the whole country. And the players feel a real responsibility because of the problems there have been at home in recent years. Reaching the World Cup has created immense happiness in Ivory Coast, and we want to keep

the people happy with our performances.

What has been the basis of your success?

I owe my success to hard work, to always remembering that you can never rest on your laurels. When I joined Arsenal there were a lot of famous players there, and I watched and listened to them and learned about football. That's what I tell my team-mates; that nothing comes without hard work. We deserved our qualification and now we have to fight as hard as we can to show our best in Germany.

Interview by Jim Holden



IVORY COAST



TACTICS

THE IVORIANS have the most settled side of the five African finalists, although Henri Michel is not afraid to change the make-up depending on the opposition.

Jean-Jacques Tizie is the first-choice keeper, but he's struggling with injury, so Boubacar Barry is on stand-by. The solid back four is led by Kolo Toure, who offers extraordinary pace and commitment. His central defensive partner is likely to be either Abdoulaye Meite or Blaise Kouassi. The full-backs – Emmanuel Eboue (right) and Arthur Boka (left) – are both adept at overlapping and make a valuable contribution to the attack.

Rising star Didier Zokora takes the defensive midfield, "enforcer" role. He offers outstanding workrate and patrols the midfield with remarkable authority. Youthful Emerse Fae is the preferred right-sided option, with Kanga Akale a creative force on the left. In a more cautious line-up, the tall figure of Yaya Toure would play in central midfield alongside Zokora. If a more adventurous style is needed, Bonaventure Kalou would be introduced behind the two strikers, Didier Drogba and (probably) Arouna Kone, with Yaya Toure dropping to the bench. Kalou also provides cover for the forward line, where Aruna Dindane can also expect to see some action.

Henri Michel

COACH 29.10.47



Heading for his fourth finals appearance as a coach, having led his native France to the semi-finals in 1986, Cameroon in 1994 and Morocco in 1998. The 58-year-old has also coached Tunisia, Paris Saint-Germain and Morocco's Raja Casablanca. Captained France as a player and won 58 caps.

Boubacar Barry

GOALKEEPER

30.12.79
Beveren (Belg)
5 caps (0 goals)



Slight, well-coiffured keeper who could take the No 1 jersey if Tizie fails to recover from injury. One of the numerous graduates of the ASEC Abidjan academy brought to play at Beveren.

Gerard Gnanhouan

GOALKEEPER

12.02.79
Montpellier (Fra)
6 caps (0 goals)



Should get the third keeper spot but his cause wasn't helped by a disastrous performance in the 3-2 home World Cup qualifying defeat by Cameroon last September. The former Sochaux keeper has been a scapegoat ever since, though he made the Nations Cup squad.

Jean-Jacques Tizie

GOALKEEPER

07.09.72
Esperance (Tun)
22 caps (0 goals)



Has been a regular squad member for more than a decade and became first-choice four years ago. Has produced some fine performances at club level, but has been plagued by injury over the past year.

Arthur Boka

DEFENDER

02.04.83
Strasbourg (Fra)
20 caps (1 goal)



Diminutive but feisty left-back who is a key part of the defence. Started out at ASEC Abidjan and went to Beveren before signing for Strasbourg. Last year he helped the side win the French Cup but has been mired in a relegation quagmire this term.

Guy Demel

DEFENDER

13.06.81
Hamburg (Ger)
6 caps (0 goals)



Has made just one start at international level but a solid season in the Bundesliga boosted his World Cup chances. Born in Paris but has spent most of his professional career in Germany. Can also play in midfield.

Cyril Domoraud

DEFENDER

22.07.71
Creteil (Fra)
48 caps (0 goals)



The oldest player in the squad and his main asset is his air of authority. Has had a busy career playing for some top European clubs, including Marseille, Internazionale and Monaco. Now back at Creteil where he started out.

Emmanuel Eboue

DEFENDER

04.06.83
Arsenal (Eng)
9 caps (0 goals)



It has already been a wonder year for the right-back, first breaking through into the Ivorian starting line-up at the Nations Cup and then also making his mark with Arsenal. A Belgian Cup finalist two years ago with Beveren, where he spent three seasons.

Blaise Kouassi

DEFENDER

02.02.75
Troyes (Fra)
34 caps (0 goals)



Did not have much of a run during the qualifiers but proved an effective, aggressive option at the Nations Cup in January. Won the African Champions League with ASEC Abidjan in 1998 before a transfer to Guingamp in France.

Abdoulaye Meite

DEFENDER

06.10.80
Marseille (Fra)
15 caps (0 goals)



The Marseille-born defender must be pleased he finally opted to play for the Ivorians after holding out in the vain hope of winning a place in the France side. Appointed captain by his club at the start of the season but has not had as much playing time as he would have liked.

Kolo Toure

DEFENDER

19.03.81
Arsenal (Eng)
40 caps (1 goal)



First showed his potential after reluctantly agreeing to join friends in a match as a teenager. Since then he has played at ASEC Abidjan, Beveren and now Arsenal, with whom he won the League in 2004 and the FA Cup last year.

Marc Zoro

DEFENDER

27.12.83
Messina (Ita)
12 caps (0 goals)



Made headlines after taking a stand against racist abuse during a club game against Inter; he picked up the ball and threatened to walk off mid-match in protest. Left Ivory Coast as a teenager to join another Italian side, Salernitana. Only a reserve in the national squad.

Kanga Akale

MIDFIELDER

07.03.81
Auxerre (Fra)
20 caps (2 goals)



Attacking midfielder with an impressive workrate. Also gets the occasional goal, such as the one against Sudan in the Ivorians' final World Cup qualifier last October. Came to prominence in Switzerland at Sion and FC Zurich, and has never played top-flight football in his homeland.

Emerse Fae

MIDFIELDER

24.01.84
Nantes (Fra)
11 caps (0 goals)



A world champion at Under-17 level with France in 2001 but was persuaded to play for the Ivorians two years ago, as he was allowed to do under the terms of new FIFA regulations. Born in Nantes and came through the ranks of the club's fabled youth academy.

Tchiressoa Guel

MIDFIELDER

27.12.75
Lorient (Fra)
75 caps (10 goals)



The country's most capped international was dropped a year ago after failing to secure a new club contract. But his old side, Lorient, took him back in December, re-opening the window for national team selection. Previous clubs include Marseille, Saint-Etienne and Ankaragucu.

Siaka Tiene

MIDFIELDER

22.02.82
Saint-Etienne (Fra)
22 caps (0 goals)



Has not made the expected impact in left midfield at Saint-Etienne since his move from South Africa's Mamelodi Sundowns. Came to prominence in 1999 at ASEC Abidjan, with whom he won four League titles in as many years. Nicknamed Chico.

Yaya Toure

MIDFIELDER

13.05.83
Olympiakos (Gre)
11 caps (1 goal)



A powerful midfield force, much taller than his elder brother, defender Kolo, and almost as quick. Followed the same path as his sibling, from the ASEC Abidjan academy to Beveren, but then moved to Ukraine and Greece, where he won the title with Olympiakos in April.

Gilles Yapi Yapo

MIDFIELDER

30.01.82
Young Boys (Swi)
24 caps (2 goals)



Has lost three Cup Finals, all in penalty shoot-outs, in the past two years – the French Cup with Nantes in 2004, the Nations Cup with Ivory Coast in February this year, and the Swiss Cup in April with Young Boys, with whom he is on loan from Nantes.

Didier Zokora

MIDFIELDER

14.12.80
Saint-Etienne (Fra)
35 caps (0 goals)



A world-class defensive midfielder who prowls the pitch in the style of an enforcer. Has been repeatedly linked with clubs in England and Italy, and is likely to move after the World Cup. Won the Belgian League with Genk in 2002, then moved to France.

Aruna Dindane

FORWARD

26.11.80
Lens (Fra)
32 caps (10 goals)



Had a successful spell with Anderlecht, then moved to ambitious Lens last year. Debuted in the national team at 19 and has been to two Nations Cup finals, although he did not play in Egypt this year because of injury and then the death of his daughter.

Also in contention

Defender **SEYDOU KANTE** (07.08.81; Beveren, Belg; 4 caps, 0 goals) was recently recalled to the squad after a four-year absence and played against Spain in Valladolid in March.

ABDOULAYE DIIRE (28.02.81; Beveren, Belg; 9 caps, 0 goals) played in the World Cup qualifiers and would provide midfield cover. **ROMARIC N'DRI** (04.06.83; Le Mans, Fra; 6 caps, 0 goals) is inexperienced at international level but did see some action at this year's Nations Cup.

Coach Michel recently ran the rule over forward **AMARA DIANE** (19.08.82; Strasbourg, Fra; 0 caps), who has been in prolific form in the French League. **BAKARY KONE** (17.09.81; Nice, Fra; 13 caps, 3 goals) was frequently used as a substitute striker at the Nations Cup. **KANDIA TRAORE** (05.07.80; Le Havre, Fra; 12 caps, 5 goals) has come into contention after scoring goals galore in the French Second Division.

Didier Drogba

FORWARD

11.03.78
Chelsea (Eng)
29 caps (21 goals)



His phenomenal goal tally for Ivory Coast includes nine from the World Cup qualifiers; he also now captains the side. Joined Chelsea from Marseille for £24.5m in 2004. Sent to France by his parents to get a proper education and was a late bloomer on the pitch.

Bonaventure Kalou

FORWARD

12.01.78
Paris Saint-Germain (Fra)
46 caps (11 goals)



Won the UEFA Cup with Feyenoord in 2002. At his best playing behind the strikers but has not often shown his club form for the national team. Feyenoord-based younger brother Salomon has been seeking a Dutch passport to enable him to play for Holland.

Abdelkader Keita

FORWARD

06.08.81
Lille (Fra)
23 caps (6 goals)



A move to France last summer has catapulted him back into national team contention and he scored on his first game back, against Spain in March, after a three-year absence. Previous clubs include Etoile Sahel (Tunisia) and Al Sadd (Qatar). Elder brother Fadel also played for Ivory Coast.

Arouna Kone

FORWARD

11.11.83
PSV Eindhoven (Hol)
15 caps (2 goals)



Has emerged as first-choice partner for Drogba after being ignored for much of the qualifiers. Recently won the Dutch League in what was his first season at PSV following spells at another Dutch club, Roda JC, and Lierse in Belgium. Started his career at Ivorian side Rio Sport.

JAPAN

Fight on their hands

Zico's men will do well to match the achievement of reaching the last 16 in 2002



Playing it our way...Hidetoshi Nakata and his team-mates have benefited from Zico's approach



MIKE PLASTOW
IN TOKYO

JAPAN ARE PLAYING in their third consecutive World Cup and already look like seasoned participants. They beat Tunisia and Russia last time and reached the last 16. This time round, the media and fans have set the bar at the same height – to get through to the knockout stages – but that is going to be hard to achieve.

Japan's rise continues to impress. They had not qualified for a World Cup until 1998, and after gaining automatic entry as co-hosts four years ago, this is only the second time that they have won their place on the pitch.

Even so, the Japanese were clear favourites to reach Germany from the start of their section, and never looked like failing. They won their third Asian Cup in four tournaments in 2004 and defeated Greece, the European champions, at last year's Confederations Cup. Japan also drew 2-2 with Brazil at the latter tournament, and other notable results from the past couple of years include a win against the Czech Republic in Prague in 2004.

So the team are a force to be reckoned with. Their big strengths are strong discipline and a midfield packed with players capable of producing the unexpected; shots can come in from anywhere, with Shunsuke Nakamura to the fore. The weaknesses are relative inexperience in defence, where Japan have no overseas-based players, slightness of physique, and a lack of outstanding strikers.

Off the cuff

The biggest differences from 2002 are that the midfield is even more experienced and versatile now, and that Brazilian coach Zico leads the team in a far different manner to that of French predecessor Philippe Troussier. While the latter drummed strategy and tactics into his players, Zico wants them to play it more off the cuff.

The exciting experiment has been to add the coach's Brazilian faith in star quality to the loyal, hard-working Japanese ethos. The fascinating mixture has produced some appalling performances but, more often than not, does allow the team to pull something out of the bag.

Zico has instilled a never-say-die attitude in a team that keeps the fans' hearts in their mouths, but bounces back from mistakes and produces surprises – witness Mitsuo Ogasawara's stupendous goal from inside his own half against Finland in February.

The fact Japan can now play this way shows how much the country's football culture has changed from the era of disciplined but amateurish company teams of only 15 years ago. In a contest of flair and experience, however, it is hardly fair to compare Japan with Brazil. Croatia and Australia, too, have more players at big clubs than Japan.

Assuming that Brazil will take one of the top two slots, Japan's chances cannot be much better than one in three. Those are long odds, even for a team with their great spirit.

'The team keep the fans' hearts in their mouths but can bounce back and produce surprises'

'We are now a team that don't give up'

THE COACH: Zico

How prepared are the team with just a few weeks until the finals?

We'd be ready if the finals started tomorrow. The players know what to do whatever formation we use because we have been doing these things for four years. I have a lot of options about who to combine with whom in which formation, and we have basically got everything ready during the last few games.

How have Japan changed since 2002?

The big thing that's changed is that however strong our opponents may be or however famous their shirt, the Japan players face them without fear. We have played a number of strong teams, and won some and drawn some, and each of those games has given my players a big



confidence boost. We have become a team that don't give up and are extremely offensive and goal-oriented.

How would you describe your style and philosophy?

The core of my philosophy is that nothing is decided until the final moment of the match.

The fact that we have turned so many games around shows this philosophy has taken root. The big questions are when to take the risks and attack and not disrupt the defence by all attacking at once. The players must maintain the balance in their heads.

Which three players do you most want the world to see, and why?

First, Hidetoshi Nakata. He has become a symbol because of what he has achieved as a Japanese player around the world. He has proven ability. Alongside him, there's Shunsuke Nakamura. Japan has now raised the sort of player who can astonish the world. He is also playing in Europe, with Celtic, and is now recognised as a symbol of Japanese football. Then there's Naohiro Takahara, who plays

SCHEDULE

MAY 13 Japan v Scotland (Saitama)
MAY 17 or 18 Start of training camp in Japan
MAY 26 Squad travel to World Cup base – the Hilton hotel in Bonn
MAY 30 Japan v Germany (Leverkusen)
JUNE 4 Japan v Malta (Dusseldorf)

WORLD CUP GROUP F

JUNE 12 Japan v Australia (Kaiserslautern)
JUNE 18 Japan v Croatia (Nuremberg)
JUNE 22 Japan v Brazil (Dortmund)

in Germany but couldn't play in the last World Cup because of illness. He has a burning determination inside, he'll be playing at home, and will make an almighty effort to do something for the team.

What would you consider to be a satisfactory World Cup for Japan?

The first objective is to get through the group, but that in itself is very difficult.

How do you view your group opponents, Australia, Croatia and Brazil?

I think we have been drawn in the strongest group. Common sense says Brazil will go through, and the other

three all have about an equal chance. But that's only in theory. It's going to be a very tight battle.

How do you feel about leading Japan against your own country, Brazil?

It makes no difference who the opponents happen to be. The aim is always to beat the team in front of me.

What will you do after the World Cup?

I'd like to try managing in Europe if I get the chance. The only definite thing I can say at the moment is that my relationship with the Japanese FA will end after the World Cup.

'The fans won't accept it if we don't get through the group'

THE PLAYER: Yuji Nakazawa

Japan have been using a couple of different formations. Do they both function equally well?

Well, it's mostly a matter of whether the overseas-based players are available or not. But both systems work well. The important thing is how well we communicate.

You didn't play in 2002 but were very much involved in the pre-World Cup squad. How would you compare the teams then and now?

Having different coaches makes comparison very hard, but we now have a lot more players who are based abroad than we did then, and I think

we are a stronger team this time because of that.

Is Zico very different from Philippe Troussier?

Troussier was very big on discipline and rules, whereas Zico doesn't tell players the small details of exactly what to do. He places enormous importance on utilising a player's imagination.

What are the expectations of the Japanese people?

They're extraordinarily high, and we have a responsibility to respond to those expectations. The fans won't accept anything less than us getting through the group.

What about your group opponents?

Australia have a fantastic manager in Guus Hiddink. He has achieved a lot, including, of course, with South Korea. They also have players who are doing well in other countries and are extremely strong. Croatia also looked very strong in their friendly against Argentina. As for Brazil, they can aim for the trophy.

What kind of player is Yuji Nakazawa?

Cheerful more than anything else. I'm not the most skilful of players, but I have a down-to-earth



roughness that some others don't have.

You score a lot of goals for a defender.

Well, I did play as a forward as a kid, but then switched to defence. Now the

most important thing for me is to keep a clean sheet.

What are your personal goals for the World Cup?

It's a dream come true to play there so I want to make sure I'm on top of my game.



TACTICS

PHILIPPE TROUSSIER, Zico's predecessor as coach, was a firm believer in a three-man defence; Zico, one of the Frenchman's most outspoken critics, was in favour of four. Once in charge, however, the Brazilian bent to player and media pressure and has used a 3-5-2 formation to good effect. 4-4-2 is still the most likely choice at the World Cup but it is a close call. Japan's relative strength in midfield and weakness in attack might prompt Zico to use a single striker on occasion.

The basic Zico 4-4-2 has two aggressive, attack-minded full-backs – Alex on the left and Akira Kaji on the right – with Tsuneyasu Miyamoto and Yuji Nakazawa in the middle. Miyamoto controls the line, and Nakazawa adds much-needed bite. For his two defensive midfielders, Zico is likely to use his best player, Hidetoshi Nakata, and his most rugged, Takashi Fukunishi. Junichi Inamoto is another possibility.

If Nakata is in holding mode, Mitsuo Ogasawara has the most to offer on the right flank and Shunsuke Nakamura on the left. A quick-passing game is required to compensate for Japan's relative weakness in the air. The combination of Naohiro Takahara's physique and passing skill with Takayuki Suzuki's pesky aggression looks to be the best combination up front.

In the 3-5-2, Alex and Kaji take the wide midfield positions, with the dependable Makoto Tanaka coming into the back line. Nakamura tucks in behind the strikers. Ogasawara drops out.

If only one striker is used, nimble midfielder Daisuke Matsui might be employed to exciting effect alongside Nakamura.

Zico

COACH 03.03.53

The Brazilian, who played in three World Cups, came to Japan in 1991 to play for Sumitomo Metals (now Kashima Antlers) and has been a participant in the country's football growth ever since. He was a natural choice to take the national team reins in 2002, despite having little coaching experience – just 11 league games as Antlers' caretaker in 1999.

Yoichi Doi

GOALKEEPER

25.07.73
FC Tokyo
4 caps (0 goals)



Very consistent for FC Tokyo, showing strong physical presence, steady judgement and sharp reflexes. Doi, a regular reserve keeper in Zico's squad since 2003, has a far less gung-ho style than Kawaguchi.

Yoshikatsu Kawaguchi

GOALKEEPER

15.08.75
Jubilo Iwata
85 caps (0 goals)



An agile keeper with superb reflexes who rises to the big occasion. Kawaguchi, the France 98 keeper, lost the jersey to Narazaki four years ago, partly because he was not a first-team regular with Portsmouth and then Nordsjaelland, but has held it again since the 2004 Asian Cup.

Seigo Narazaki

GOALKEEPER

15.04.76
Nagoya Grampus Eight
50 caps (0 goals)



The less flamboyant Narazaki was preferred to Kawaguchi in 2002 but lost the jersey after some high-profile errors. Started this season injured and has failed to regain his first-team place at Grampus. Formerly the highest-earning Japanese J.League player, on £500,000 a year.

Alex (Alessandro Santos)

DEFENDER

20.07.77
Urawa Reds
68 caps (5 goals)



Came to Japan from Brazil as a schoolboy and got Japanese nationality just in time for the 2002 World Cup. The key player on the left wing, he is at his best moving forward, dribbling and crossing. A dead-ball specialist who scores some spectacular free-kicks.

Akira Kaji

DEFENDER

13.01.80
Gamba Osaka
40 caps (1 goal)



A fine tackler and also creative going forward. Played for Cerezo Osaka, Oita Trinita (in Division Two) and FC Tokyo before joining Gamba, the defending champions, this year. Scored Japan's opening goal in the final World Cup qualifier against Iran.

Yuichi Komano

DEFENDER

25.07.81
Sanfrecce Hiroshima
6 caps (0 goals)



A quick, physical wing-back, equally happy on left or right. Played at the 2001 World Youth Cup and 2002 Asian Games but suffered a cruciate ligament injury in 2003 and then broke his collar bone at the 2004 Olympics. Made his senior debut last summer.

Tsuneyasu Miyamoto

DEFENDER

07.02.77
Gamba Osaka
65 caps (3 goals)



Captain and sweeper who emerged at the 1993 Under-17 World Championship. Led Japan at the 2002 World Cup wearing a face protector because of an injury. Was linked with Treviso in Italy last summer but stayed on at Gamba to help them win their first League title.

Yuji Nakazawa

DEFENDER

25.02.78
Yokohama F Marinos
46 caps (9 goals)



Fast, strong on the ground and in the air, and dangerous at set-pieces. As a youngster he saved up from part-time jobs to go to Brazil, where he played for America. Returned to join Verdy Kawasaki and was the J.League's Rookie of the Year in 1999. Player of the Year in 2004 when with Marinos.

Makoto Tanaka

DEFENDER

08.08.75
Jubilo Iwata
31 caps (0 goals)



Was one of Japan's best young defenders and played at the 1996 Olympics but had to wait until 2004 for his senior team debut. Now a regular starter when Japan use a three-man defence. A strong marker, clinical tackler and quick to snuff out danger.

Keisuke Tsuboi

DEFENDER

19.09.79
Urawa Reds
30 caps (0 goals)



A fast, hard-tackling central defender who joined Reds out of university. Tsuboi was the J.League's Rookie of the Year in 2002 and ever-present for a year from his senior Japan debut in June 2003, but lost his place after suffering a thigh tendon injury. Back to form for Reds this year.

Yasuhito Endo

MIDFIELDER

28.01.80
Gamba Osaka
38 caps (3 goals)



Gamba's corner, free-kick and penalty specialist also has good defensive skills, calm distribution and packs a powerful long shot. A skilful player and regular squad member since Zico took charge. A member of the 1999 World Youth Cup squad.

Takashi Fukunishi

MIDFIELDER

01.09.76
Jubilo Iwata
58 caps (7 goals)



A rugged player who provides the grit that the highly polished Japanese midfield would otherwise be lacking. His aerial strength also makes him dangerous at set-pieces. Appeared as a substitute against Russia at the 2002 finals and has been a Zico favourite since late 2003.

Junichi Inamoto

MIDFIELDER

18.09.79
West Bromwich (Eng)
62 caps (4 goals)



Japan's former golden boy, the youngest ever J.League player and scorer in 1997, and part of the Under-20 side that were runners-up at the 1999 World Youth Cup. Japan's hero at the 2002 World Cup after scoring twice. Not much club action this term but offers good tackling and distribution.

Daisuke Matsui

MIDFIELDER

11.05.81
Le Mans (Fra)
4 caps (1 goal)



A small, quick attacking midfielder who made his Japan debut in 2003 but failed to secure regular games. His form improved after joining Le Mans in 2004 and he was recalled by Japan for the European tour last October. The French League's Player of the Month in January.

Shunsuke Nakamura

MIDFIELDER

24.06.78
Celtic (Sco)
58 caps (15 goals)

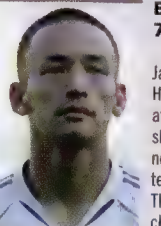


A dead-ball specialist, creative passer and non-stop runner, with a great left foot. Nakamura was left out by Philippe Troussier in 2002 but has been a key man for Zico from the start. Player of the tournament at the 2004 Asian Cup.

Hidetoshi Nakata

MIDFIELDER

22.01.77
Bolton (Eng)
72 caps (11 goals)

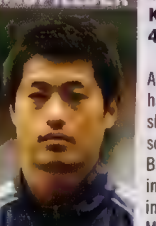


Japan's most experienced midfielder. He can take on both defensive and attacking roles, has good distribution skills, strong physical presence and none of the usual Japanese reserve in telling his team-mates what to do. The big concern is over his lack of club action.

Mitsuo Ogasawara

MIDFIELDER

05.04.79
Kashima Antlers
48 caps (7 goals)



Antlers' attack-minded captain has great passing and dead-ball skills. He also has an eye for goal, scoring against North Korea and Bahrain in the qualifiers, and from inside his own half against Finland in February. Linked with Lecce and Messina last year.

Shinji Ono

MIDFIELDER

27.09.79
Urawa Reds
51 caps (6 goals)



Japan's most talented player, a pinpoint passer, appeared as a sub aged 18 at France 98 and has been a first-team regular since 2000. Plagued by injuries during his spell with PSV but is now playing regularly again after returning to Japan. Lacking pace and aggression, however.

Tatsuhiko Kubo

FORWARD

18.06.76
Yokohama F Marinos
31 caps (11 goals)



A powerful, single-minded striker with a thunderous shot, but who also produces an occasional deft touch. Much less direct verbally – club boss Takeshi Okada says he needs an interpreter to know what Kubo is thinking. Has suffered recurring back problems and is struggling to get fit.

Also in contention

RYOTA TSUZUKI (18.04.78; Urawa Reds; 3 caps, 0 goals) would be in line to take the third keeper berth if any of the squad probables suffered an injury.

In defence, left-sided **SHINJI MURAI** (01.12.79; Jubilo Iwata; 4 caps, 0 goals) offers pace down the wing, while **TERUYUKI MONIWA** (08.09.81; FC Tokyo; 8 caps, 1 goal) is a dependable central defender.

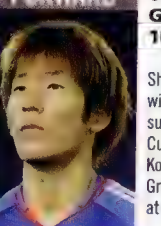
Many people would love to see Zico give a chance to young midfielder **MAKOTO HASEBE** (Urawa Reds; 18.01.84; 2 caps, 0 goals). He plays deep but his surging runs offer a real attacking threat, and he is also a creative dribbler and passer with a good shot. **KOJI NAKATA** (09.07.79; Bastia, Swi; 54 caps, 2 goals) is a versatile and experienced squad man, while **YUKI ABE** (06.09.81; JEF United; 6 caps, 0 goals) is a gritty defensive midfielder and world-class dead-ball specialist. **MASASHI MOTOYAMA** (20.01.79; Kashima Antlers; 28 caps, 0 goals) can fill in as either an attacking midfielder or striker.

KEIJI TAMADA (11.04.80; Nagoya Grampus Eight; 35 caps, 7 goals) was a regular up front till last summer but has been slipping out of the picture. The more likely back-up forwards are **SEIICHIRO MAKI** (07.08.80; JEF United; 7 caps, 2 goals), a tall, no-nonsense player with plenty of heart, and the lithe, agile **HISATO SATO** (12.03.82; Sanfrecce Hiroshima; 4 caps, 2 goals), who was the J.League's top Japanese scorer last year and has already netted two delightful goals for Japan since his February debut.

Masashi Oguro

FORWARD

04.05.80
Grenoble (Fra)
16 caps (5 goals)

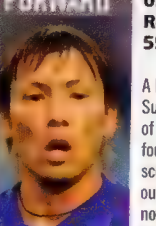


Sharp striker who pops up and scores with clinical accuracy. Proved a real supersub when hitting crucial World Cup qualifying goals against North Korea and also the winner against Greece and equaliser against Brazil at last summer's Confederations Cup.

Takayuki Suzuki

FORWARD

05.06.76
Red Star Belgrade (Ser)
55 caps (11 goals)



A hard-running, battling style makes Suzuki a big defensive asset, on top of his attacking attributes. Played all four games at the 2002 World Cup, scoring against Belgium, and had an outstanding Asian Cup in 2004, but not a shoo-in for a starting berth. Moved to Red Star in January.

Naohiro Takahara

FORWARD

04.06.79
Hamburg (Ger)
40 caps (15 goals)



A powerfully built forward with a delicate touch. Takahara's career started well, winning the J.League and Asian club titles in 1999 with Jubilo and the 2000 Asian Cup. But a move to Boca Juniors did not work out and he missed the 2002 World Cup because of deep vein thrombosis.

Atsushi Yanagisawa

FORWARD

27.05.77
Kashima Antlers
55 caps (17 goals)



An experienced striker with fine positioning skills and a sharp turn of pace inside the box. But he broke a foot bone in March and is struggling to be fit for the finals. He returned to Antlers from Messina this year and had only just netted a hat-trick in the J.League when suffering his injury.

MEXICO



BRIAN HOMEWOOD



High point... Rafael Marquez and co impressed against Argentina at last year's Confederations Cup

'I've fitted into the systems of umpteen coaches; I don't see why I couldn't fit into Lavalpe's'

Cuauhtemoc Blanco

The coach has also ended Mexico's traditional dependence on the talents of one or two outstanding individuals, preferring instead to focus on solid organisation. At last year's Confederations Cup, where Mexico beat Brazil in the group stage and lost only on penalties to Argentina in the semi-finals, the team were repeatedly praised for their tactics.

Training camps

Few other coaches have enjoyed as much time with their players as Lavalpe. With only three of the likely squad based abroad, Mexico have been able to play friendlies and organise training camps almost at will, without depending on FIFA's calendar. Last year alone, they played 26 games, and when Lavalpe named his provisional World Cup squad at the start of April, the players were immediately whisked off to a training camp in Acapulco and their clubs left to complete the League championship without them.

Of course, it has been far from plain sailing.

Lavalpe has angered many people by selecting two naturalised players – Brazil-born midfielder Antonio Naelson and Argentina-born forward Guillermo Franco – and Rafael Garcia, his son-in-law.

Even more controversial was the coach's decision to leave out Cuauhtemoc Blanco, the only Mexican player capable of producing the truly unpredictable, on the grounds that he did not fit into the system.

"I've played under umpteen coaches and fitted into all their systems, so I don't see why I couldn't fit into Ricardo's," Blanco responded. Many suspect that the forward's fearsome temper, his difficulty in getting on with his team-mates and his refusal to play at the Confederations Cup have more to do with Lavalpe's decision.

There have been hiccups on the field, such as a painful 2-0 defeat in the United States, a shock loss against Trinidad & Tobago, and, worryingly, failure to win any of the first six matches against European opposition under Lavalpe. Mexico finally broke their duck by beating Hungary in December.

But now, after being surprisingly seeded, the Mexicans face Portugal, Angola and Iran in an apparently easy group, while the United States, the team they really fear, are safely in the other half of the draw. Although Mexico's second round opponents will be from the Group of Death – Argentina, Ivory Coast, Serbia & Montenegro or Holland – they look perfectly capable of reaching the semi-finals.

mentality and self-belief rarely seen in the past. Once, Mexican players often had to wait until their late twenties before an international call-up, but Lavalpe has reduced that age drastically, in some cases selecting players who had barely played a competitive game at club level. The likes of Carlos Salcido, Luis Perez and Gonzalo Pineda are already seasoned internationals in their mid-twenties.

Quality time

Coach Lavalpe and his squad are reaping the rewards of seeing so much of each other

MEXICO'S BEST FINALS performances were in reaching the quarter-finals in the two tournaments they hosted, 1970 and 1986. They have never done better than the last 16 on foreign soil, but this time they are confident they can go much further, even all the way to the Final.

Ricardo Lavalpe, Mexico's gruff, even rude, Argentinian coach, has given the team a winning

'We plan to go down in World Cup history'

THE COACH: Ricardo Lavalpe



How much progress have Mexico made in the past few years?

Since I took charge we've already achieved great things such as staying in the top six of the FIFA rankings for three years in a row and being seeded in the World Cup draw. Now our plan is to go down in the history of the World Cup.

So what can you achieve at this World Cup?

If the players show the same level of teamwork and understanding, the same degree of concentration and the same will to win as in last year's Confederations Cup, they will be a top four side.

You attracted a lot of criticism for not selecting

SCHEDULE

MAY 12 Mexico v DR Congo (Mexico City)
MAY 27 Mexico v France (Paris)
JUNE 1 Mexico v Holland (Eindhoven)
The squad then travel to World Cup base – the Hotel Freizeit in Göttingen, 100km south of Hanover

WORLD CUP GROUP D

JUNE 11 Mexico v Iran (Nuremberg)
JUNE 16 Mexico v Angola (Hanover)
JUNE 21 Mexico v Portugal (Gelsenkirchen)

Cuauhtemoc Blanco. Why did you leave him out?

A great player sometimes doesn't fit into the team because of certain characteristics of the system of playing.

And you included the naturalised Mexicans Antonio Naelson and Guillermo Franco.

I would say around 80 per cent of the strikers who play in the Mexican League are foreigners, and if one of them is a naturalised Mexican, I don't understand why I can't pick him. If the constitution says he's Mexican, that's good enough for me.

You once said that 70 per cent of journalists are really bad. Do you still have a negative view of the media?

In Mexico, people just look at the negative side rather than the positive side. My predecessors – [Miguel] Mejia Baron and [Enrique] Meza, for example – had to put up with the same things. What Mexico needs is some unity, to protect the players, rather than constant criticism. In Mexico, there are lots of doubts and lots of criticism. But if you leave the country, you find that the international press believes that Mexico could do something important. The good thing is that, abroad, Mexico are getting respect.

'I did not expect to play at another finals'

THE PLAYER: Claudio Suarez

Were you surprised to be named in the provisional World Cup squad?

No. I have played more than 170 games for Mexico and I have been more surprised when I have shown bad form on occasion. Rather, I'm just very satisfied and grateful that the coach thinks I can still do a good job. Obviously, I believe I can, but his opinion has to be more realistic than mine. It's also good to prove people wrong, the ones who said that it was the end when I went to MLS.

What do you remember about your first call-up, in 1992?

It was when [Argentinian] Cesar Luis Menotti was in charge. I remember it very clearly because I had not been expecting it, and when I got the news I was bowled over. I was a right, winger then and I played half a match against El Salvador. I'm not sure how well I did but Menotti must have been happy because he kept on picking me.

Best memories?

One of the best is one of the earliest, when we were runners-up at the Copa America in Ecuador in 1993. That was perhaps the best

Mexico team I have played for in terms of quality and commitment.

Your 100th match, against Trinidad & Tobago in 1998, must have been a very emotional occasion.

I felt very proud and humble. A lot of great players never reach that total. I had been lucky with injuries. The badge FIFA gave me is very special to me, too. What made it stand out all the more was that it was something that gave the team hope because we were not playing well at the time. It showed that the game turns for everyone.

You missed the last World Cup through injury. Did you think that was your last chance gone?

Yes. I broke a leg in the warm-up before a friendly against the United States. It was terrible not to be going to Korea and Japan, but at least I had had a good career. I did not expect to play another World Cup because the game today is so demanding both mentally and physically. It takes longer to get over little injuries, too. But if the coach thinks I can do a job I'll do it.

Then on to become the first player with 200 caps?

I really don't think so!





TACTICS

MEXICO ARE ARGUABLY the most tactically versatile team at the World Cup, often switching their formation during the course of a game. During last year's Confederations Cup, Ricardo Lavolpe fielded six midfielders in the semi-final against Argentina, no strikers in the first-round game against Greece, and alternated between a three-man and a four-man defence.

The coach has spent three years studying potential players and given tactical obedience and versatility the same importance as individual talent. The most striking example of this was the exclusion of Cuauhtemoc Blanco from the provisional finals squad because he does not fit in with the system.

Although Mexico still play their traditional passing game, they no longer depend on the talent of one or two individual players.

Lavolpe rarely fields the same line-up for two games in a row. Somewhere along the line, however, there will be room for Oswaldo Sanchez in goal, Francisco Rodriguez, Ricardo Osorio and Carlos Salcido in defence, Rafael Marquez as libero or in central defence, captain Pavel Pardo in defensive midfield, attacking midfielder Antonio Naelson, and Francisco Fonseca, who offers pace and power, and aerially strong Jared Borgetti in attack.

Other options include left-sided midfielder Ramon Morales, pacy, skilful teenage left wing-back Andres Guardado, and opportunistic striker Omar Bravo.

Mexico seem to have their greatest difficulty against physical opposition.

Ricardo Lavolpe

COACH 06.02.52



Goalkeeper who won four caps for his native Argentina and was a non-playing member of the 1978 World Cup squad. Has been in Mexico for many years as a player and coach, and took the national team reins after the last World Cup. Has a reputation for being gruff, but is also renowned for his tactical nous and for being a father figure to the players.

Jose de Jesus Corona

GOALKEEPER 26.01.81
Tecos UAG
6 caps (0 goals)



Relatively small for a keeper but his excellent reflexes have made him the No 2 choice. Played at the Athens Olympics and made his senior team debut last year. Raised at Atlas, but now plays for their local rivals, Tecos UAG.

Guillermo Ochoa

GOALKEEPER 13.07.85
America
1 cap (0 goals)



Edged out Moises Munoz and Oscar Perez for the third-choice keeper spot. Made his debut in the friendly against Hungary in December.

Oswaldo Sanchez

GOALKEEPER 21.09.73
Guadalajara
67 caps (0 goals)



Orthodox and imposing, Sanchez has buried the image of the eccentric Mexican goalkeeper left by Jorge Campos and his luminous shirts in 1994 and 1998. Was reserve to Campos at the latter finals, and Oscar Perez four years later, but now the undisputed first-choice.

Joel Huiqui

DEFENDER 18.02.83
Cruz Azul
8 caps (1 goal)



Made only one appearance in the qualifiers but has been given a good run in recent friendlies and has performed well. Strong left-sided defender who likes to join the attack. Came through the ranks at Pachuca; joined Cruz Azul in 2004.

Rafael Marquez

DEFENDER 13.02.79
Barcelona (Spa)
64 caps (6 goals)



The first Mexican to find success at a major European club since Hugo Sanchez at Real Madrid in the 1980s. Can play in defence or midfield and offers excellent timing in the tackle and good distribution. Showed his vicious streak at the last World Cup when sent off against the USA.

Mario Mendez

DEFENDER 01.06.79
Monterrey
31 caps (1 goal)



Right-sided defender who played in two friendlies in 2000 but then had to wait three years for a recall. Won half his caps last year as he enjoyed an extended run in the team, including the Confederations Cup. Raised at Atlas, joined Toluca in 2004 and moved to Monterrey this year.

Ricardo Osorio

DEFENDER 30.03.80
Cruz Azul
35 caps (1 goal)



Made his debut against Brazil at the 2003 Gold Cup and quickly established himself at the heart of the defence, also playing in the World Cup qualifiers, the 2004 Copa America and the 2005 Confederations Cup.

Francisco Rodriguez

DEFENDER 20.10.81
Guadalajara
28 caps (1 goal)



"Maza" was selected by Lavolpe at a young age and has blossomed. Generally plays on the right of a three-man defence or in the centre of a back four. Has an ungainly appearance, but is strong in the air and composed in possession. Has a tendency to pick up red cards.

Carlos Salcido

DEFENDER 02.04.80
Guadalajara
28 caps (2 goals)



Another of Lavolpe's proteges. Little-known even at club level three years ago, he is now a seasoned international and played in eight of the 10 final stage World Cup qualifiers. Has lots of pace, good vision, is strong in the tackle and comfortable on the ball.

Andres Guardado

MIDFIELDER 28.09.86
Atlas
5 caps (0 goals)



Youngest player in the squad. Made his professional debut last September and his Mexico debut three months later. A left-sided wing-back or midfielder whose searing pace and trickery have made him an instant hit.

Israel Lopez

MIDFIELDER 29.09.74
Toluca
23 caps (0 goals)



Right-sided midfielder with a good long-range shot but his appearances have been sporadic and he missed out on the 2002 World Cup. Can be temperamental and was once involved in a fight with Cuauhtemoc Blanco at Los Angeles airport. Played under Lavolpe at Toluca.

Jaime Lozano

MIDFIELDER 29.09.78
Tigres
23 caps (11 goals)



Left-sided midfielder with an excellent scoring record – he hit 11 goals in the qualifiers (though five were against minnows Dominica) in just nine starts. A recent loss of form meant he nearly lost his squad place, but he recovered. Won two titles with Pumas UNAM; joined Tigres last year.

Ramon Morales

MIDFIELDER 10.10.75
Guadalajara
40 caps (5 goals)



The nearest thing to an out-and-out winger in the squad. The left-sided player has plenty of pace and a powerful shot. Scored a memorable winner from a free-kick against Argentina at the 2004 Copa America. Played in the last World Cup but was then out of favour for two years.

Antonio Naelson

MIDFIELDER 23.05.76
Toluca
28 caps (4 goals)



Born in Brazil and played for Rio Branco, a Second Division club in Sao Paulo state. Moved to Mexico in 1997 and having won a national team call-up became the first naturalised player to score for Mexico, in 2004. Married to a Mexican and speaks fluent Spanish.

Pavel Pardo

MIDFIELDER 26.07.76
America
124 caps (6 goals)



Defensive midfielder with a good long-range shot and has been made captain under Lavolpe. Spent his entire career in Mexico, starting with Atlas and making a one-year stop at Tecos UAG before joining America in 1999. Played in the 1998 World Cup but missed out on 2002.

Luis Perez

MIDFIELDER 12.01.81
Monterrey
49 caps (8 goals)



The diminutive attacking midfielder has neat skills and a clinical finish and is another player who has flourished under Lavolpe. Made his debut at 17 against El Salvador in 1998 but had won only five more caps by the end of 2002 and did not make either of the last two World Cups.

Gonzalo Pineda

MIDFIELDER 19.10.82
Guadalajara
26 caps (0 goals)



Another player plucked from obscurity by Lavolpe to become a fully-fledged international in only two years. Called up for his debut against Iceland in 2003 before he had played a First Division match. Appeared at the 2004 Olympics. Recently joined Guadalajara from Pumas UNAM.

Gerardo Torrado

MIDFIELDER 30.04.79
Cruz Azul
52 caps (2 goals)



Tenacious midfielder who was one of Mexico's top players at the last World Cup but then spent two years in the wilderness before being recalled. Returned to Mexican club football in June after five years in Spain, with Tenerife, Sevilla and Racing Santander.

Jesus Arellano

FORWARD 08.05.73
Monterrey
64 caps (7 goals)



The "Little Goat", a survivor of the 1998 and 2002 World Cups, has been given few outings by Lavolpe and criticised the coach's policy of using naturalised players, yet was included in the provisional squad of 26 for this summer's finals. A dribbling specialist.

Also in contention

Only three players are in the running because Lavolpe named a 26-man provisional squad at the start of April.

JOSE ANTONIO CASTRO (11.08.80; America; 8 caps, 0 goals) is a contender to cover for the right-back spot, moving up the pecking order after Salvador Carmona was given a one-year drugs ban.

Defender **CLAUDIO SUAREZ** (17.12.68; Chivas USA; 176 caps, 6 goals) is the second-most capped player in the world and a veteran of the 1994 and 1998 World Cups. Missed out on 2002 after breaking a leg earlier that year. Known as The Emperor.

Midfielder **RAFAEL GARCIA** (14.08.74; Atlas; 50 caps, 3 goals) was, along with Franco, the most controversial inclusion in the provisional finals squad since he has been in indifferent form. Many observers feel he has been given preferential treatment because he is Lavolpe's son-in-law, but the coach argues that Garcia fits in with his tactics.

Jared Borgetti

FORWARD 14.08.73
Bolton (Eng)
72 caps (37 goals)



Mexico's all-time leading scorer and the first player from the country to appear in the English Premier League, although he has barely got off the bench at Bolton. The leading scorer with 14 goals in the entire World Cup qualifying tournament and scored twice at the last finals.

Omar Bravo

FORWARD 04.03.80
Guadalajara
28 caps (6 goals)



Penalty area specialist whose goals helped take Guadalajara to the Libertadores Cup semis last year. Made his Mexico debut in 2003 and is considered first reserve for either Borgetti or Fonseca. Clinched his place in the squad with two goals against Paraguay in March.

Francisco Fonseca

FORWARD 02.10.79
Cruz Azul
27 caps (17 goals)



Strong, powerful forward who scored 10 goals in the qualifiers and is one of Mexico's most popular players. Joined Pumas UNAM in 2002 after spells with Second Division clubs and helped them to two successive titles. But stunned Pumas by moving to arch-rivals Cruz Azul.

Guillermo Franco

FORWARD 03.11.76
Villarreal (Spa)
5 caps (2 goals)

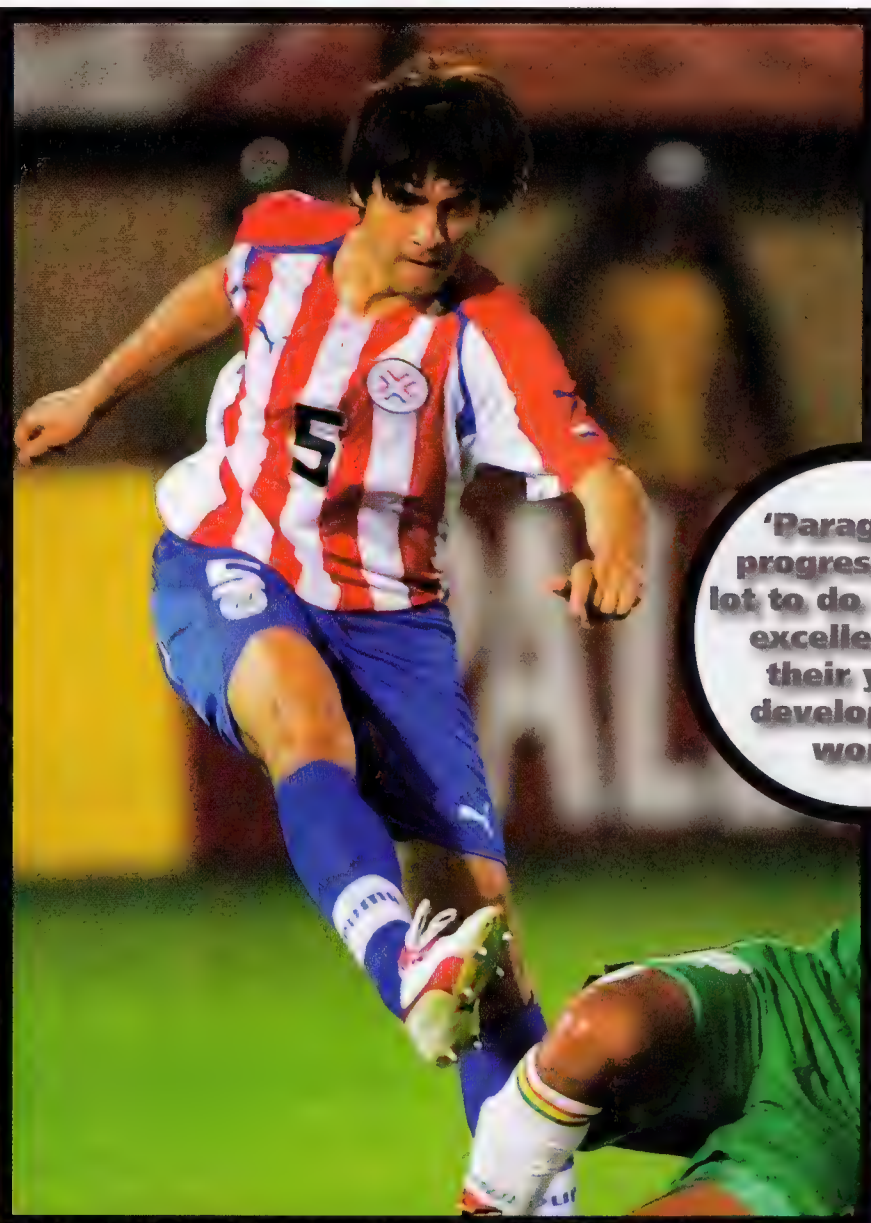


Alongside Rafael Garcia, the most controversial choice in the provisional squad. Franco was born and bred in Argentina and has no family connection with Mexico. He arrived in 2002 to play for Monterrey and left early this year to join Villarreal. But became naturalised during that spell.

PARAGUAY



TIM VICKERY



Ready to peak....Julio Cesar Caceres can lean on his experience of the 2002 tournament

'Paraguay's progress has a lot to do with the excellence of their youth development work'

domestic game has made a dramatic advance. Perhaps it has something to do with the end of the hideously stifling dictatorship of General Alfredo Stroessner in the early 1990s. A people more able to express themselves in life may find it easier to express themselves on the football field.

Certainly the progress has a lot to do with the excellence of the youth development work being carried out in the country. Somehow the resources are found to provide for extensive tournaments and leagues for teenage talent, even though some senior top division

games attract crowds of well under 1,000.

All this filters through to the national team. Paraguay have a fair record in recent World Youth Cups and were semi-finalists five years ago. They took silver at the 2004 Olympics, and last year the senior side clinched their place in Germany having just been rebuilt with the introduction of a highly promising group of young players.

Fears unfounded

The good times began with qualification for the 1992 Olympics. As this generation grew older there were fears that 2002 would mark the end of Paraguay's period of success. This has proved unfounded. Instead, the side now contains a very interesting blend of veterans (Carlos Gamarra, Denis Caniza, Roberto Acuna, Carlos Paredes and Jose Cardozo go back to France 98), players from the 2002 squad who should now be at their peak (Justo Villar, Julio Cesar Caceres, Carlos Bonet, Nelson Cuevas and Roque Santa Cruz), and a bright new generation spearheaded by Nelson Haedo Valdez, Julio Dos Santos and Edgar Barreto.

Unusually for Paraguay, defending in the air could be a problem in Germany. There is a lack of height in goal and at the heart of the defence, which both England and Sweden could expose.

Providing this potential weak point is adequately protected, Paraguay have the resources to justify their pre-tournament optimism. Their resilience can keep them in with a chance in games where they are in danger of being overrun. They carry a threat from set-pieces, and are always capable of sneaking a goal at a vital moment.

They now also boast a depth of attacking resources they have not always had, especially as it seems that Bayern Munich striker Santa Cruz is on the way to making a complete recovery from his knee problems.

Paraguay, then, are not going to win the World Cup. But any side that underestimate them could find themselves in for a nasty shock.

over five million. But Paraguayan football is a remarkable phenomenon. They have always known how to turn adversity into strength – the poor quality of local pitches has made heading a traditional strength, and their team spirit and quiet, dogged resistance have long been feared in South America.

Now, though, the Paraguayans have added new strings to their bow. The technical level of the

Rags to riches

Paraguay may be a poor country, but the national team have a wealth of talent and attributes

PARAGUAY STRIDE into their seventh World Cup with the confidence that this one might be their best ever. For the first time they have made it to three successive tournaments. They reached the second round in both 1998 and 2002, and now their sights are set still higher.

Such ambitions are extraordinary for an impoverished country with a population of little

'My players rise to the occasion at the vital moment'

THE COACH: Anibal Ruiz



You are Uruguayan, yet have built a strong identification with Paraguayan football. How did this happen?

I came here in 1979 [as Luis Cubilla's assistant with Olimpia] and we won all possible titles – League, Libertadores Cup, World Club Cup. These triumphs helped construct a relationship with the players and the public of

Paraguay. And it works both ways. We worked hard to get inside the head of the Paraguayan players, because first one is a human being, and second a footballer, and understanding them makes it easier to get through to them.

How has a relatively small and poor country managed to qualify for three consecutive World Cups?

You have to look far ahead in order to see the closer picture. We've invested in our youth sides and taken them to play all over the world. The result is that the base of our senior side has come up through the ranks. It's a process that started from the 1992 Olympics.

Your players make their living all over Europe and Latin America. How difficult is it to keep track of them all?

It's not easy. But on balance it's a positive thing. Having players in Europe gives us a certain knowledge of European football. And having role models who play abroad encourages our young players to set themselves the same objective. They see that increasingly the demands are greater, the player has to keep preparing himself to live up to them, and he needs a bigger and better intellect to do so.

You had a bad year in 2004, winning only one of your seven World Cup qualifiers. Did you ever think you would fail to reach the finals?

SCHEDULE

MAY 18-JUNE 1 Based in Flachau, Austria
MAY 24 Paraguay v Norway (Oslo)
MAY 27 Paraguay v Denmark (Aarhus)
MAY 31 Paraguay v Georgia (Dumblin, Austria)
JUNE 1 Squad travel to World Cup base – the sports school at Oberhaching, near Munich
JUNE 3 Paraguay v Bavaria XI (Oberhaching)

WORLD CUP GROUP B

JUNE 10 Paraguay v England (Frankfurt)
JUNE 15 Paraguay v Sweden (Berlin)
JUNE 20 Paraguay v Trinidad & Tobago (Kaiserslautern)

No, because of the spirit of the players. Being with them, observing their behaviour, I saw and felt their confidence. It's a Paraguayan thing. At the vital moment they rise to the occasion. We were never out of the top four [the automatic qualifying spots], but there were times when we operated at the limit, and we always did well in those situations.

You have said that meeting England first is the best start Paraguay could have. Why?

Going to the World Cup means travelling with dreams and ambitions. And straight away we come up against one of the favourites. It forces us

to concentrate on every last detail right from the start. We want to measure ourselves against the best. It is tremendous motivation, and I'm very confident we'll do well.

Coaching international teams has traditionally been seen as a task for the experienced. But now Holland and Germany have relative novices in charge.

There is space for capable youngsters as well as more mature coaches. Whatever his age and experience, the short time in which to work makes the intellectual capacity of the coach more important in his quest to make the right decisions and get the best out of players.

'Chilavert's power meant things got out of proportion'

THE PLAYER: Cesar Ramirez

What are your boyhood memories of the World Cup?

Watching it on TV in 1986 was the first time I got caught up in the atmosphere of the competition. Paraguay were there, and after we were knocked out, Argentina went on to win the trophy. In the absence of Paraguay I always supported Brazil and Argentina, the other South American countries. Of course I wanted to be there. I knew it would be difficult. But I've been to one World Cup, and now I'm close to a second.

You went to France 98. What did you do there that so upset Jose Luis Chilavert?

I don't think it was at the World Cup. But to be honest, I don't know what I did or where I did it. He never sat down and told me to my face. And it wasn't only me. It was Julio Enciso and Miguel Benitez as well. Everyone was telling me that we were not part of the national team because he wanted us out. I read about it in the newspapers. And the story was confirmed when he stopped playing for Paraguay, and suddenly we were back.

How did one player become so important that he had a veto on squad selection?

Chilavert was highly respected by the rest of the

team and the directors. As a leader and a player you can't deny his importance. But he got more and more powerful and in the end things got out of proportion. He became more powerful than the directors. In fact, he became more of a



director than a player, which didn't do his career any good.

Will team spirit be better without him?

Not necessarily. We've always had a good group. Team spirit is the greatest and most traditional strength of the national team, and when we take the field with that spirit then it's hard to beat us, home or away.

There seems to be a lot of confidence in Paraguay that this could be your best World Cup.

It could be. We're in a difficult group, with England and Sweden. Making it out of

the group will be the hard part. If we do that then anything can happen – we could go on to achieve something big.

As a youngster you were picked up by Sporting Lisbon and great things were expected. Are you now ready to fulfil the potential you showed at that time?

I hope so. I could have achieved more in my career. The truth is that I matured late. But now I've got a big chance in the World Cup, and I'm going to give everything to show that I can be an important member of the team.



PARAGUAY



TACTICS

"PARAGUAYANS KNOW how to play zonally," says coach Anibal Ruiz, "with one supporting another and nobody playing on his own. And 4-4-2 gives us the most rational distribution of players on the field." This, then, is their base system. But the team will be working extensively on variations, and it is even possible that they might not play 4-4-2 in any of their group games. If they have to win against Trinidad & Tobago in the final match, they may switch to 3-5-2, which gives them width and allows the midfield runners to get into the box.

A strong case can be made for using a 4-5-1 against England in the opening match. Ruiz is concerned about leaving his central midfielders one on one with Frank Lampard and Steven Gerrard, and also worries that England's strongest flank – the right – is up against the weaker side of his defence. To address this, Ruiz could sacrifice a striker, bring in Paulo Da Silva to add solidity at left-back, push Jorge Nunez up to left midfield and move Julio Dos Santos centrally.

There is also the positioning of the defensive line to consider. "We mustn't defend too deep," Ruiz says. "We want to take the game further up the field." This may prove tricky. Paraguay tend to feel most comfortable defending on the edge of the penalty area, even though their lack of height relative to European opposition can make this policy dangerous.

In contrast, their aerial strength in attack can be formidable, and they will expect to take full advantage from free-kicks and corners.

Anibal Ruiz
COACH 30.12.42

Born in Uruguay but played and has coached all over Latin America. Spent many years as assistant to compatriot Luis Cubela, who first took him to Paraguay in 1979. Seen as a stop-gap when appointed national coach after the last World Cup, but has held on, even though it was a bumpy ride. Comes across as a gentle, wise figure.

Derlis Gomez
GOALKEEPER 02.11.72

Sportivo Luqueno
5 caps (0 goals)

Relatively short, somewhat pudgy figure who became the reserve keeper towards the end of the qualifiers. Kept a clean sheet despite awkward moments against Venezuela as Paraguay sealed their finals place. In good form with his club but could be exposed at the top level.

Justo Villar
GOALKEEPER 30.06.77

Newell's Old Boys (Arg)
37 caps (0 goals)

Third-choice keeper in 2002 but now undisputed No 1. Lacks height and is unhappy when off his line, but has fine reflexes and is a capable shot stopper. He says: "I try to do my job with my hands, not my mouth" – so, a change in style to flamboyant predecessor Jose Luis Chilavert.

Carlos Gamarra
DEFENDER 17.02.71

Palmeiras (Bra)
104 caps (11 goals)

Paraguay's most capped player and also "the best centre-back ever", according to club-mate Marcos, Brazil's keeper at the 2002 finals. Gamarra's air of authority has earned him the moniker Colorado, the name of Paraguay's traditional ruling party. But at 35 can he still hit the heights?

Julio Manzur
DEFENDER 22.01.81

Santos (Bra)
13 caps (0 goals)

Centre-back known as Robocop because of his enforcer approach and thick-set build. Formed an effective partnership with Gamarra in the 2004 Olympic silver medal-winning side and deputised for him in three World Cup qualifiers. Has adapted well to Brazilian football.

Edgar Barreto
MIDFIELDER 15.07.84

NEC Nijmegen (Hol)
13 caps (0 goals)

Talented, combative midfielder likely to feature on the right flank. Strikes the ball extremely well, and his free-kicks are a key part of the team's attacking armoury. His brother Diego is in contention for the third keeper's slot.

Carlos Bonet
MIDFIELDER 02.10.77

Libertad
27 caps (1 goal)

Strong-running right-sided midfielder who lost his place after the 2002 finals because of a long injury lay-off. Now in line for a recall, not least because of his versatility – he has been impressive as a central midfielder marker in Libertad's Libertadores Cup campaign.

Cristian Riveros
MIDFIELDER 16.10.82

Libertad
7 caps (0 goals)

A rising force who's been in storming club form and deputised effectively for Paredes away to Venezuela in the qualification-clinching tie. The lithe midfielder combines sharp tackling with a dynamic pass-and-move game. Could make the first XI, especially in a 4-5-1 formation.

Salvador Cabanas
FORWARD 05.08.80

Jaguars (Mex)
15 caps (1 goal)

An attacking midfielder in his youth but became a striker and consistent goalscorer in Chile and then Mexico. A squat figure with an excellent turn of pace who is also adept at receiving the ball with back to goal. Could feature in the hole behind a lone striker.

Nelson Haedo Valdez
FORWARD 28.11.83

Werder Bremen (Ger)
9 caps (2 goals)

Scored the goal against Venezuela that sealed Paraguay's finals place. He is quick and strong, can cut in from the flanks or operate with back to goal and is dangerous with either foot or in the air. A real find.

Dante Lopez
FORWARD 16.08.83

Genoa (Ita)
7 caps (3 goals)

Rangy, physical striker who enjoys cutting in from out wide. Had already played in Spain and Israel before moving to Italy, but his international experience is largely limited to friendlies.

Julio Cesar Caceres
DEFENDER 05.10.79

River Plate (Arg)
30 caps (2 goals)

Classy centre-back whose career took off after he was converted from a central midfielder. Broke into the side in the run-up to the last World Cup, where he played in all four games. Joined River Plate at the start of the year.

Denis Caniza
DEFENDER 20.08.74

Cruz Azul (Mex)
72 caps (1 goal)

By nature a centre-back, but currently filling the right-back role and has also played as a left-back, left wing-back and defensive midfielder. Always dependable wherever he plays and featured in all Paraguay's games at the last two World Cups.

Paulo Da Silva
DEFENDER 01.02.80

Toluca (Mex)
31 caps (0 goals)

Solid, well-built defender who played in two World Youth Cups and was unlucky to miss out on the last World Cup. Can play as a sweeper or marker, but has also often figured as a strictly defence-minded left-back, a role he may well fill against England.

Jorge Nunez
DEFENDER 22.01.78

Estudiantes (Arg)
14 caps (1 goal)

Left-back whose marking ranges from deficient to non-existent, but who can make an important attacking contribution with his scampering runs, measured crosses and well-struck free-kicks. Perhaps most effective as a wing-back or wide midfielder.

Delio Toledo
DEFENDER 10.02.76

Zaragoza (Spa)
29 caps (4 goals)

Tall left-back who has a tendency to be caught off balance and provoked into making rash tackles. However, his surging runs offer an attacking threat. Hardly featured in qualification, but, perhaps significantly, he played on the left of midfield in 0-0 draws against Brazil and Argentina.

Roberto Acuna
MIDFIELDER 25.03.72

Deportivo La Coruna (Spa)
91 caps (5 goals)

Argentina-born veteran of the past two World Cups who won a recall after nearly three years away and steered the side to Germany. "The Bull" has lost some of his spring, but can still gore the opposition with his raking passes. Also balances the midfield with his sound positioning.

Julio Dos Santos
MIDFIELDER 07.05.83

Bayern Munich (Ger)
15 caps (5 goals)

Tall, elegant attacking midfielder who was crucial to the team's vital qualifying wins against Argentina and Venezuela. Composed in possession, is a splendid passer and has the strength to surge into the opposition box. A potential Michael Ballack replacement at Bayern.

Diego Gavilan
MIDFIELDER 01.03.80

Newell's Old Boys (Arg)
39 caps (0 goals)

Right-sided midfielder who has not fulfilled the potential that once attracted Newcastle, but even so has carved out a solid career in Latin America. Involved, often as a substitute, throughout the qualifying campaign, offering energy and a cultured right foot.

Carlos Paredes
MIDFIELDER 16.07.76

Reggina (Ita)
66 caps (10 goals)

The key to the midfield. Reads the game well, marks tightly, tackles hard, passes long and short, has the energy to burst forward and finishes well, especially in the air. Paredes was a promising youngster at France 98 and a huge disappointment in 2002; this should be his best World Cup.

Jose Cardozo
FORWARD 19.03.71

San Lorenzo (Arg)
80 caps (24 goals)

Paraguay's all-time top scorer, and only Ronaldo scored more goals in the South American qualifiers. Tall, bustling striker who improved after turning 30, a result of hard work and determination. But time seems to have finally caught up with him and he may have only a bit-part to play in Germany.

Nelson Cuevas
FORWARD 01.10.80

Pachuca (Mex)
32 caps (5 goals)

Darting little winger who scored twice as a sub against Slovenia at the last World Cup to put Paraguay into the second round. Somewhat inconsistent, and Ruiz is concerned he is not a first-team regular with Pachuca, but he does offer pace, skill and the capacity to create havoc off the bench.

Cesar Ramirez
FORWARD 21.03.77

Flamengo (Bra)
20 caps (0 goals)

Nicknamed *El Tigre*, but his bite should be fiercer. Has strength, pace, acceleration and two good feet, but is far from prolific. Even so, he works the channels well and sets up plenty of chances. Appeared twice as a sub at France 98 but then fell foul of all-powerful keeper Jose Luis Chilavert.

Roque Santa Cruz
FORWARD 16.08.81

Bayern Munich (Ger)
42 caps (13 goals)

The beanpole striker is racing to recover from surgery for a knee injury, the latest in a series of setbacks. Without them, Santa Cruz could have developed into a world-class forward. Even so, he is dangerous in the air and has surprising acceleration and a rocket right-foot shot.

Also in contention

The battle for the third keeper's berth is between the brave and athletic **DIEGO BARRETO** (16.07.81; Cerro Porteno; 2 caps, 0 goals) and **ALDO BOBADILLA** (20.04.76; Libertad; 6 caps, 0 goals), who has height in his favour.

The lack of height in central defence could mean a call-up for **PEDRO "GOOSE" BENITEZ** (23.03.81; Cerro Porteno; 7 caps, 0 goals), who can be clumsy on the ground but deals well with aerial threat. Another centre-back very close to making the finals is left-footer **JUAN DANIEL CACERES** (06.10.73; Estudiantes, Arg; 19 caps, 1 goal), who offers guts and leadership. A lack of specialist right-backs could open the door for the tall, long-striding **IGNACIO PANIAGUA** (20.09.79; Nacional, Uru; 3 caps, 0 goals).

Competition is fiercest for the right side of midfield, with Bonet and especially Gavilan looking over their shoulders. **WALTER FRETES** (18.05.82; Cerro Porteno; 4 caps, 1 goal) lacks pace, but is strong and strikes the ball with terrifying power. Then there's youth star **JOSE MONTIEL** (19.03.88; Olimpia; 5 caps, 0 goals), an impish figure whose precise passing suggests a great future ahead.

If Santa Cruz fails to recover it could mean a recall for **FREDY "ZORRO" BAREIRO** (27.03.82; Saturn, Rus; 16 caps, 2 goals), a lively striker who scored four goals at the 2004 Olympics but has been off the radar screen since moving to eastern Europe.

POLAND

What's the story?

After the debacle of 2002, there's just no guessing how the Poles will do



DARIUSZ KUROWSKI
IN WARSAW



Headliners...Maciej Zurawski and Grzegorz Rasiak will be expected to come up with goals

IN 2002, POLAND flew to South Korea with the conviction that they were capable of beating everybody. That was the philosophy of coach Jerzy Engel, who wanted the players to have more confidence. But in fact he persuaded them that they could do more than they were really capable of (he must have known that they were only average players) and the journey ended in disaster, with the team finishing bottom of their group.

Four years later, Engel's successor, Pawel Janas, is much more cautious, saying only that the minimum aim is to reach the second round. The expectations of the media and the fans are not too high either.

Of course, it would be difficult to accept a first round exit, especially with the finals being played in a neighbouring country and with many local fans planning to go to Germany to watch the games live.

So what might really happen? Well, there are two possible scenarios.

Effective unit

If Poland play as they did in the qualifiers, there is a good chance they can reach the last 16. They proved themselves to be an effective unit that may be without stars but works well together. They also scored freely – 27 goals in 10 games.

Importantly, Poland face Ecuador, theoretically their easiest group rivals, in the opening game. A victory will be a big confidence boost going into the game against Germany, whom the Poles have never beaten. But the hosts will be under huge pressure to win, and that could help Poland, who, on paper, should also be able to beat Costa Rica.

If they do get through the group, they will probably meet England or Sweden. That, too, will be a real test, but if they win that they can really start to believe everything is possible.

The other scenario is much less appealing. Firstly, the several players who are not first-team regulars at club level will be out of form and not fit enough to play in three high-level games in such quick succession.

An injury to key players Miroslaw Szymkowiak and Maciej Zurawski would reduce Poland's attacking power by half because Janas has no adequate alternative.

Tomasz Frankowski was the top Polish scorer in the qualifiers, but without good support cannot find the way to goal.

In the second scenario, the Poles would return home after three games, just like four years ago. Even Janas cannot know at this moment which scenario is more realistic for his side.

'Coach Janas says only that the minimum aim is to reach the second round'

'We have no real stars. We are strong as a team'

THE COACH: Pawel Janas



There was real euphoria in Poland after the draw, but you immediately tried to dampen it down. Why?

We cannot underestimate Ecuador just because we beat them last year. In the World Cup it will be a totally different game. We also must realise, and quickly, that

Costa Rica have recently had a higher FIFA ranking position than us. My assistants have watched them and know how good they are. Germany will be as strong as ever. If we make it to the next round that will tell you whether we were good enough or not.

Is it significant that Poland have never beaten Germany?

That statistic is correct, but the difference between the two sides is not so big now. They are even quite similar. And we are able to fight with them.

One German website claimed Poland have only one real star – Jerzy Dudek.

Poland have no real stars. We are strong as a team. If

one or two players are out injured or out of form, I have a big problem. For example, Jacek Krzynowek was my key man last year. Now, he does not play regularly for Bayer Leverkusen. The same with Dudek, who after a fantastic Champions League Final was not in Liverpool's starting XI.

It seems to be a real problem that many Poles are not regular players at their clubs.

Only a few are starters every week but despite this the squad must be perfectly physically prepared for the tournament. There is not enough time for me to do it in the few days just before the World Cup. I can only work with them on tactical issues or on speed training. I keep

SCHEDULE

MAY 14 Poland v Faroe Islands (Wronki)
MAY 23-29 Training camp, probably in Hungary
MAY 30 Poland v Colombia (Chorzow)
MAY 31 Squad travel to World Cup base – the Gilde Sporthotel Fuchsbachtal in Barsinghausen, near Hanover
JUNE 3 Poland v Croatia (Wolfsburg)

WORLD CUP GROUP A

JUNE 9 Poland v Ecuador (Gelsenkirchen)
JUNE 14 Poland v Germany (Dortmund)
JUNE 20 Poland v Costa Rica (Hanover)

regular contact with the players and know everything about all their training sessions and all their reserve games. But it would be much better to see them playing first-team football, even if only one or two games a month.

What are the strengths of your team?

We scored in all 10 qualifiers, 27 goals in total. That is our biggest advantage. And a couple of players showed their class, Ebi Smolarek and Maciej Zurawski. I have been

especially pleased by Smolarek's recent progress.

You do not like interviews and media interest. So is the World Cup a special pressure?

I played in the World Cup and I will be there again for the first time as a coach. The team's results will be a testimony to my coaching skills. But it is not the end of the world. Seven years ago I overcame lymph gland cancer. Can you imagine a bigger pressure? I have already won the most important battle in my life.

'I'd say Poland are very experienced rather than too old'

THE PLAYER: Jerzy Dudek

What did you learn from the disappointments of the last World Cup?

Poland were playing at the finals for the first time since 1986. Everything was new to us and we made lots of mistakes, but we realised how big a deal the World Cup really is. Now, with that experience, we should have fewer problems this time round. For example, we cannot stress enough how important it is to be fresh physically. We had big fatigue and fitness problems in Korea.

You did not want to face Germany. Why?

They are among the tournament favourites and have home advantage, just as

Korea did when we faced them in 2002.

What are Poland's chances?

The Poles are a proud people and can't imagine us not qualifying for the next round. But that won't be easy. In the first game we meet Ecuador, who we beat 3-0 in November. But it was played on a sodden pitch, and our opponents couldn't use their quick-passing style. Everybody knows how good the Germans are. And Costa Rica, the third team in our group, are an unknown quantity to me.

Aren't the squad too old?

I'd rather say we're very experienced – and that should be to our advantage.

Experienced players do not fear big pressure.

Will the main tactic be to defend then counter-attack?

Well, good teams such as Chelsea and Liverpool are based on solid defence, and there's nothing wrong with us trying to do our best defensively and then, if possible, create scoring opportunities. But we are not simply a counter-attacking side; we are much more attack-minded than we used to be.

You are one of several squad members who are not regular starters at club level. Will this be a problem?

Professional players can prepare well for the World Cup

even if they do not play regularly. They have to be mentally strong and do their best in each training session. Pawel Janas' response to this issue has been very important. The coach has backed the players and said unequivocally that they are good enough to be involved in the World Cup, despite their club problems. Thanks to that, the players have more confidence. And, ironically, it can be good for Poland if a few players are not regulars, since they will be much fresher and eager to prove themselves.

Is reaching the second round the best you can really expect?

We must not show fear because then the pressure will



overwhelm us. Of course, we want to win. But the World Cup is a fantastic tournament and each of us should feel happy to be part of it. If that's the case, I believe we can show we are not as easy a team to beat as many think.

POLAND



TACTICS

POLAND USE A 4-4-2 formation; experiments with 4-5-1 have not been a success.

Jerzy Dudek appears certain to get the goalkeeping jersey despite being only a substitute at Liverpool. His cause was helped when Artur Boruc, a first-teamer at Celtic, made a bad mistake that led to the United States scoring the only goal of the sides' March friendly.

Mariusz Jop and veteran Jacek Bak are the preferred central defensive partnership, with Marcin Baszczyński and Michał Żewłakow, who both like to go forward, at full-back.

During the qualifiers, Poland's two wide creative midfielders were Kamil Kosowski and Jacek Krzynówek, who regularly switched flanks. But now Kosowski (recently only a substitute at Southampton) is likely to be only the reserve for Krzynówek, on the left, with Euzebiusz Smolarek taking the starting place on the right.

Poland's key man is playmaker Mirosław Szymkowiak. Most moves come through him, and he is the main creator of chances thanks to his dribbling skills and quick, often crafty passes. The problem for coach Paweł Janas is that he has no real alternative for Szymkowiak, who gives so much during the course of a game that he is often flagging near the end. Defensive midfielder Radosław Sobolewski is a natural support for Szymkowiak, as is Sobolewski's potential replacement, Arkadiusz Radomski.

Main striker Maciej Żurawski is not only a finisher but also very dangerous when running from deep. Tomasz Frankowski is likely to take the supporting forward role.

Paweł Janas

COACH 04.03.53



Artur Boruc

GOALKEEPER

20.02.80
Celtic (Sco)
14 caps (0 goals)



Made his name with Legia Warsaw when winning the League and League Cup in 2002. Quickly proved his abilities at Celtic, whom he joined last summer, winning the Scottish League and League Cup. Still a favourite with Legia fans, whom he describes as the best in the world.

Jerzy Dudek

GOALKEEPER

23.03.73
Liverpool (Eng)
55 caps (0 goals)



The best known and most experienced Polish player. Won the Dutch League with Feyenoord in 1999 and moved to Liverpool two years later. Became famous for the "Dudek Dance" during his heroic performance in the penalty shoot-out in last year's Champions League Final.

Wojciech Kowalewski

GOALKEEPER

11.05.77
Spartak Moscow (Rus)
6 caps (0 goals)

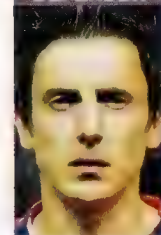


Played for Legia Warsaw then helped Shakhtar Donetsk win the Ukrainian Double in his first and only season there (2002-03). Since then he has been at Spartak Moscow, where he was voted player of the season last year.

Jacek Bak

DEFENDER

24.03.73
Al Rayyan (Qat)
70 caps (2 goals)



A rock in the centre of defence and can also play as a defensive midfielder. Joined Lyon from Lech Poznań in 1995 and then switched to another French club, Lens. Moved to Qatar last year, but now wants to return to Poland.

Marcin Baszczyński

DEFENDER

07.06.77
Wisła Kraków
29 caps (1 goal)



Right-back who likes to go forward and is an uncompromising battler. Sometimes oversteps the mark, once kicking a referee and getting banned. Joined Ruch Chorzów from amateur side Pogon Ruda Śląska in return for a few dozen footballs. Moved to Wisła in 2000 and has won four League titles.

Mariusz Jop

DEFENDER

03.08.78
FC Moscow (Rus)
9 caps (0 goals)



Solid central defender who is strong in the air. Joined Wisła Kraków in 1999 from KSZO but did not settle well. Moved to Widzew Łódź for a year, but returned to Wisła to win two League titles and two Cups. Joined FC Moscow in 2004.

Tomasz Klos

DEFENDER

07.03.73
Wisła Kraków
69 caps (6 goals)



Versatile defender, capable of playing at right-back or as stopper. Loves to go forward, especially for free-kicks and corners. Won the League with ŁKS Łódź in 1998, then joined Auxerre. Had unhappy spells at Kaiserslautern and Köln before returning to Poland, and Wisła, in 2004.

Mariusz Lewandowski

DEFENDER

18.05.79
Shakhtar Donetsk (Ukr)
23 caps (1 goal)



Despite his nickname, Lewy (Left), he is a central defender or defensive midfielder. Good in the air and shoots well from distance. Has settled well at Shakhtar, whom he joined from Groclin Dyskobolia in 2001, winning the Ukrainian League title twice.

Tomasz Rzaśa

DEFENDER

11.03.73
Den Haag (Hol)
35 caps (1 goal)



Left-sided defender who operated as a forward and a midfielder earlier in his career. Has played for many clubs in Switzerland, Holland and Serbia and won two Swiss League titles with Grasshopper and the UEFA Cup with Feyenoord. Best friend of Dudek and they often holiday together.

Michał Żewłakow

DEFENDER

22.04.76
Anderlecht (Belg)
53 caps (1 goal)



Very experienced left-back who loves to attack and is a free-kick specialist. Has spent eight years in Belgium with Beveren, Mouscron and Anderlecht (with whom he won the League in 2004), but is moving to Olympiakos in the summer.

Damian Gorawski

MIDFIELDER

04.01.79
FC Moscow (Rus)
14 caps (1 goal)

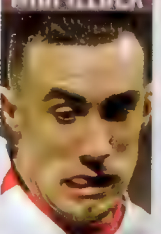


Technically adept creative right midfielder who produces many assists from out wide. Came through the ranks with Ruch Chorzów; sold to Wisła Kraków in 2003 to help ease Ruch's debts. Joined FC Moscow last year. Girlfriend Natalia Siwiec (nickname *Elittra*) is a well-known model.

Ireneusz Jelen

MIDFIELDER

09.04.81
Wisła Płock
6 caps (1 goal)



Very pacy player who can be used as a midfielder or striker and is dangerous in the box. Has achieved iconic status at Wisła Płock but now wants to move abroad and has started to learn English. A shy person who tries to avoid appearing in the media.

Kamil Kosowski

MIDFIELDER

30.08.77
Southampton (Eng)
41 caps (4 goals)



Can play on either side of midfield and is always keen to get forward to support the attack. Won two League titles with Wisła Kraków, whom he joined from Gornik Zabrze in 2000, then moved to Kaiserslautern in 2003. Failed to settle, so moved to Southampton last year.

Jacek Krzynówek

MIDFIELDER

15.05.76
Bayer Leverkusen (Ger)
56 caps (9 goals)



Speedy, left-footed midfielder who is a constant source of danger for opponents because of his dribbling skills. Also has a good shot from distance and is a threat from free-kicks. Probably bound for Wolfsburg in the summer after several years at Leverkusen.

Arkadiusz Radomski

MIDFIELDER

27.06.77
Austria Wien (Aut)
18 caps (0 goals)



Hard-working defensive midfielder. Part of Poland's Under-16 side that won the European Championship in 1993 and moved to Dutch side Heerenveen as a teenager after playing only two League games for Lech Poznań. Joined Austria Wien last year after 11 seasons in Holland.

Euzebiusz Smolarek

MIDFIELDER

09.01.81
Borussia Dortmund (Ger)
11 caps (3 goals)



Likely to be used on the right of midfield despite his success as a striker at Borussia Dortmund this season. Moved to Germany last year after only being a substitute at Feyenoord. Missed the 2002 World Cup because of a knee injury. Son of ex-Poland striker Włodzisław Smolarek.

Radosław Sobolewski

MIDFIELDER

13.12.76
Wisła Kraków
16 caps (1 goal)



Uncompromising defensive midfielder who picks up too many yellow cards. Joined Wisła from Groclin Dyskobolia in the winter of 2004 and helped them win the League. Off the field he's a very quiet character and not fond of giving interviews.

Mirosław Szymkowiak

MIDFIELDER

12.11.76
Trabzonspor (Tur)
26 caps (3 goals)



Playmaker and the team's engine whose experience and fighting spirit are crucial to the overall performance. Also a free-kick specialist. Joined Trabzonspor from Wisła Kraków last year and has settled quickly, showing good form. Cut his shirt name to "Szymek" to help the Turkish fans.

Tomasz Frankowski

FORWARD

16.08.74
Wolverhampton (Eng)
18 caps (5 goals)



Poland's top scorer in the qualifiers with seven goals, but looked most effective when used as a substitute. Was League top scorer three times with Wisła Kraków. Last year moved to Elche in Spain and then, this January, to Wolverhampton, for whom he has yet to score.

Also in contention

TOMASZ KUSZCZAK (20.03.82; West Bromwich, Eng; 2 caps, 0 goals) is challenging Kowalewski for the third keeper slot after becoming No 1 for his club side.

There are four full-backs in the running for a place – **MARCIN ADAMSKI** (20.08.75; Rapid Wien, Aut; 3 caps, 0 goals), **BARTOSZ BOSACKI** (20.12.75; Lech Poznań; 8 caps, 0 goals), **DARIUSZ DUDKA** (09.12.83; Wisła Kraków; 6 caps, 0 goals) and **MARCIN KUS** (02.09.81; QPR, Eng; 3 caps, 0 goals) – with Rzaśa's squad berth the most under threat.

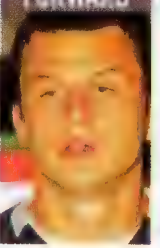
Central midfield also has plenty of competition, with the contenders including **MARCIN BURKHARDT** (25.09.83; Legia Warsaw; 10 caps, 0 goals), **PIOTR GIZA** (28.02.80; Cracovia; 3 caps, 0 goals), **SEBASTIAN MILA** (10.07.82; Austria Wien, Aut; 24 caps, 5 goals) and **MACIEJ SCHERFCHEN** (24.02.79; Lech Poznań; 1 cap, 0 goals).

Forward **MAREK SAGANOWSKI** (31.10.78; Vitoria Guimaraes, Por; 15 caps, 2 goals) is still in the frame for inclusion since he is scoring regularly in the Portuguese League.

Andrzej Niedzielan

FORWARD

27.02.79
NEC Nijmegen (Hol)
17 caps (5 goals)



Very fast striker who likes to run from deep and is a good finisher. In 2002 Gornik Zabrze "bought" him from Zagłębie Lubin in return for just 30 footballs since he was not highly rated. But he confirmed his scoring ability and earned a move to Holland with NEC.

Grzegorz Rasiak

FORWARD

12.01.79
Southampton (Eng)
26 caps (6 goals)



Lacks pace but is excellent in the air. His dream was to play in Italy, winning himself the nickname Rossi, but having signed for Siena in 2004 he did not get a single game. Moved to Derby and then, last year, to Tottenham, but because he was only a reserve he recently joined Southampton on loan.

Lukasz Sosin

FORWARD

07.05.77
Apollon Limassol (Cyp)
1 cap (2 goals)



Good finisher who scored twice on his Poland debut against Saudi Arabia in March to become a real candidate for a finals place. Won the Polish League with Wisła Kraków in 2001 but failed to convince the sceptics. Moved on to Cyprus, where he has been League top scorer for the past two seasons.

Maciej Żurawski

FORWARD

12.09.76
Celtic (Sco)
48 caps (15 goals)



Formerly a midfielder but now a successful striker, proving to be a constant danger to defences and a prolific scorer. Left Wisła Kraków last summer for Celtic, where he has been nicknamed Magic. Has a football academy named after him at his first club, Warta Poznań.

PORTUGAL



PEDRO PINTO
IN LISBON



Happy days...the national team have found success in recent years, as have Portuguese clubs

'The team have their limitations but still have enough quality to progress to the last eight'

made it past the group phase since 1966, you get the feeling that anything less than a semi-final appearance will not be good enough for those back home.

The reason for this optimism is easy to see. The national team were runners-up at the last European Championship, while Portuguese clubs have also blossomed in continental competition. FC Porto won the UEFA Cup in 2003 and the Champions League the following year; Sporting Lisbon made the UEFA Cup Final in 2005; and Benfica reached the Champions League quarter-finals this season, losing only to all-conquering Barcelona. Not a bad record for a country whose clubs hardly have the budget to compete with Europe's big guns.

Rising stars

The development of several young talents at some of the world's biggest clubs has also contributed to the feeling that Portugal have the star quality to go a long way in Germany. Of course, talent is important in the search for success, but it does not guarantee it, and Portugal have flattered to deceive in past competitions because of their inability to combine skill with teamwork. Euro 2004 was an exception to the rule, and Scolari has been credited with changing the players' mentality, but many argue that Portugal's run to the Final two years ago was more to do with the fact that they were hosts. It remains to be seen what effect the Brazilian coach's teachings will have when the team play on foreign ground and with the expectations higher than ever.

Another concern in the run-up to the finals has been the lack of playing time some of the team's key figures have had at club level. Russia-based Costinha has hardly played this year, Maniche and Paulo Ferreira have both struggled to hold down a first-team place at Chelsea, and Nuno Valente has just recovered from a serious thigh injury, which meant he saw only limited action for Everton in the last few weeks of the League campaign. Scolari has always stated that all these players will play as long as they are physically fit, even if they have not performed well with their clubs.

So the coach will rely on the core of the Euro 2004 team to come up trumps again in Germany. Although the team have their limitations, they still have enough quality to make a run to the quarter-finals. And then, who knows? A Cristiano Ronaldo feint, a Luis Figo cross and a Pauleta finish could make all the difference. And the passion would live on...

Passion play

Big things are still expected of the Euro 2004 hosts

IT'S EVERYWHERE YOU LOOK. On the beaches, on the streets, in the parks and in the playgrounds. Football is played by the young and the old, the rich and the poor. Those who can't play it, can't stop talking about it, outside restaurants and bars, offices and churches. Yes, the passion for the game is alive and kicking in Portugal.

As the World Cup approaches, and after a magical Euro 2004, people are anticipating another splendid showing by the national team. Expectations are high for Luiz Felipe Scolari's men; maybe too high. Although this is only the fourth time Portugal have reached the World Cup finals, and despite the fact that the team haven't

'I love Portugal, my family loves Portugal'

THE COACH: Luiz Felipe Scolari

What did you think of the draw?

I am happy with it. Theoretically, it is a good group for us, but there have been times in the past when Portugal were favoured to go through and it didn't happen. So, we have to approach all games with responsibility and work hard in order to achieve the results we want.

Who are your strongest group opponents?

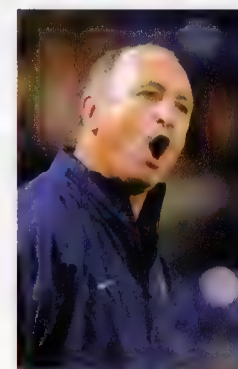
[Japan coach] Zico has told me that Iran are very dangerous, so we are not taking them for granted. Mexico have a rich history in World Cup tournaments, and Angola are no pushovers. They have something to prove in their first finals appearance.

The Portuguese people expect the team to make the second round at least.

I am expecting us to go through as well but we have to prove that we deserve a spot in the last 16. My only thought is to go into every game with a winning mentality.

You have complained in the past about the treatment you receive from the Portuguese press. Do you feel there is prejudice towards you because you are Brazilian?

I know there are a lot of people who would like to see a Portuguese manager in charge. There was a time when it wasn't acceptable to have foreign managers coaching national teams. However, now it is normal, and people have



to get over it. I love Portugal, my family loves Portugal, and I will continue working hard, regardless of what people think.

What did the return of Luis Figo mean to you and the team?

I understood his decision

SCHEDULE

MAY 17 Squad meet in Lisbon for training camp
MAY 20 Travel to Evora in southern Portugal for the second phase of training
MAY 27 Portugal v Cape Verde Islands (Evora)
JUNE 2 Travel to Luxembourg for third phase of training
JUNE 3 Portugal v Luxembourg (Metz, France)
JUNE 4 Travel to World Cup base — the Klosterpforte hotel in Marienfeld, some 90km north-east of Dortmund

WORLD CUP GROUP D

JUNE 11 Portugal v Angola (Cologne)
JUNE 17 Portugal v Iran (Frankfurt)
JUNE 21 Portugal v Mexico (Gelsenkirchen)

to retire after Euro 2004, but always hoped he would come back. His presence is very important to us, on and off the field. He has incredible charisma and has added leadership to a team that needed an inspirational figure to look up to.

You have been criticised for picking players who are not performing at club level. How do you react to these attacks?

I pick players according to their past performances for the national team. If they have served me well, they will continue to deserve a place in

my squad. I don't think people have a reason to criticise me considering the fact I have picked over 40 players since I started managing Portugal. That shows I am not as stubborn as people believe I am and that I am open to selecting different players.

How important is team spirit to you?

It is crucial. I pick players according to their skills, but also taking into account their personality and professionalism. I have no problems excluding players because of their attitude, even if they are stars.

'I'm expecting to have fun'

THE PLAYER: Deco

Portugal have always had problems against weaker teams. Considering people expect you to beat Angola, Iran and Mexico, are you worried about not living up to expectations?

We won't be caught off guard. We cannot underestimate our opponents, especially Iran and Angola. Our objective is to finish in the top two, and there is no room for error.

Who will be your toughest group opponents?

Mexico have the most World Cup experience, so we have to respect them, but the team that worry me most are Angola. It will be their first World Cup match ever, and they will want to show the

world they deserve to be there. Also, they are a former colony of Portugal so will have even more motivation to do well.

What are Portugal's strengths and weaknesses?
The team is unchanged

from Euro 2004 and we know each other well. That is a definite strength. A weakness could be the lack of depth in some positions. Jorge Andrade's injury means we have lost a key player in defence and it will be tough to replace him.

Who is Portugal's most influential player?

I don't know. It's hard to pick one player because we have a great team. However, if I was to pick the most influential section, I would pick midfield. We have very talented players in the centre of the park and we rely on them to give the side stability.

Luiz Felipe Scolari has been criticised repeatedly for selecting players regardless

of their form at club level. How do the players react to this criticism, and does it affect the atmosphere when the squad get together?

Not at all. We all respect Scolari, and he has a special relationship with us, treating us as his family. As far as his choices go, you have to understand that many players may not be shining for their clubs, but they have repeatedly proven their worth to him, and he trusts them. It's hard to please the fans, the journalists and the players. I wouldn't want to be in his shoes!

What does it mean for you to play in a World Cup for the first time?

I am sure it will be a

fantastic experience. Euro 2004 was amazing, and I am expecting to have fun in Germany. To represent Portugal in football's premier event is special to me, and I just hope that I can help the team make it to the final stages of the competition.

What expectations do you have for the World Cup?

I want to win it. Of course, if we make the semi-finals it would be good, but we can't go into the competition thinking about losing to anyone. As long as we make it past the group phase, which we have to do, then anything can happen. Brazil are the favourites, but we have the quality to beat any team on any field at any time.

PORTUGAL



TACTICS

PORTUGAL DO NOT stray from what is a well-organised 4-2-3-1 formation. In front of keeper Ricardo, Luiz Felipe Scolari is expected to pick Miguel at right-back, Ricardo Carvalho and Fernando Meira in central defence, and Nuno Valente on the left. When Portugal have possession, the coach likes the full-backs to push forward, allowing the wingers – Luis Figo and Cristiano Ronaldo – to support lone striker Pauleta. This requires one of the defensive midfielders, normally Costinha, to drop back and play as a third central defender, protecting the team in case of counter-attacks.

Although Costinha has lost a bit of pace, his sense of positioning is crucial for the balance of the team. The job of the other holding midfielder, who will probably be Maniche, is to find space in order to receive the first pass out of defence or give the forwards an outlet.

Deco will be relied upon to create goalscoring opportunities. He is a master at pulling the strings, tending to play short passes to the wings and then moving into space, looking for a return pass with the aim of shooting or playing in Pauleta. Figo and Ronaldo constantly look for space on the flanks, and their ability to get past their opponent can turn a game on its head.

Pauleta will see little of the ball outside the area; his overwhelming responsibility will be to finish what the attacking midfielders create for him.

Luiz Felipe Scolari
COACH 09.11.48

Big Phil is an authoritarian figure who does not accept dissent, often leaving out disruptive players regardless of talent. The 57-year-old led his native Brazil to the World Cup four years ago and then took Portugal to the Euro 2004 Final. He has also won two Libertadores Cups and several Brazilian titles. His contract with Portugal expires this July.

Paulo Santos
GOALKEEPER 11.12.72
Sporting Braga
1 cap (0 goals)

The veteran has helped northern side Sporting Braga up to fourth in the League behind Portugal's big three, and his form earned him a first cap at the age of 33. A leader on and off the pitch.

Quim
GOALKEEPER 13.11.75
Benfica
24 caps (0 goals)

Small but agile keeper who sat on the bench for most of the season at Benfica. Was previously back-up to Vitor Baia in the Portugal set-up and now plays second fiddle to Ricardo. Not one to ruffle feathers, and his quiet nature has served him well within the national squad.

Ricardo
GOALKEEPER 11.02.76
Sporting Lisbon
47 caps (0 goals)

Had a tumultuous start to the season, losing his first-team place at Sporting, but he recovered well and finished strongly. Often criticised for his ineptitude at dealing with crosses, but is one of the best shot-stoppers in European football. Has always been No 1 keeper under Scolari.

Fernando Meira
DEFENDER 05.06.78
Stuttgart (Ger)
28 caps (2 goals)

Many eyes will be on the tall central defender, who has been entrusted with the responsibility of replacing the injured Jorge Andrade in the starting line-up. Good on the ball and in the air, but his aggressive tackling often gets him in trouble with referees.

Marco Caneira
DEFENDER 09.02.79
Sporting Lisbon
12 caps (0 goals)

Can play anywhere across the back four. Has mainly been used at left-back at Sporting, whom he joined on loan from Valencia mid-season, but can also play on the right and in the middle. One of the more popular players because of his laid-back attitude off the pitch.

Miguel
DEFENDER 04.01.80
Valencia (Spa)
26 caps (1 goal)

Started his career as a winger but was converted to a right-back at Benfica by Jose Antonio Camacho three seasons ago. Has since made great strides, and combines attacking flair with defensive solidity. But although he is dangerous going forward, his crossing could be better.

Nuno Valente
DEFENDER 12.09.74
Everton (Eng)
22 caps (1 goal)

A first-choice for Scolari, who has always been a fan of his aggressive style of play. A serious knee injury at the end of last season put his career in jeopardy and had FC Porto questioning his ability to play at the top level again. He moved to Everton and his form there has proved the doubters wrong.

Paulo Ferreira
DEFENDER 18.01.79
Chelsea (Eng)
29 caps (0 goals)

The right-back, who won the Champions League with FC Porto, has struggled to hold down a first-team place at Chelsea and with Portugal. Prone to making mistakes in big games and was on the bench for most of Euro 2004 after a disastrous showing against Greece in the opening game.

Ricardo Carvalho
DEFENDER 18.05.78
Chelsea (Eng)
22 caps (1 goal)

Portugal's best all-round defender and one of the world's best tacklers. A series of top performances at Euro 2004 earned him national hero status and he is now expected to lead the defence at the World Cup by example.

Ricardo Rocha
DEFENDER 03.10.78
Benfica
2 caps (0 goals)

The burly central defender did an excellent marking job on Ronaldinho in Benfica's Champions League tie with Barcelona to earn himself a place in the World Cup squad. Rocha had been in the wilderness for two years, but Jorge Andrade's injury opened the door.

Costinha
MIDFIELDER 01.12.74
Dinamo Moscow (Rus)
42 caps (2 goals)

Known as The Minister for his eloquent speeches before and after matches, Costinha is a natural-born leader and has always been one of Scolari's favourite players. In the World Cup picture despite sitting out half a season at Dinamo Moscow, where he fell out with coach Yuri Semin.

Deco
MIDFIELDER 27.08.77
Barcelona (Spa)
33 caps (2 goals)

Known as The Magician, and Portugal need him to use his wand wisely in Germany. The Brazil-born star controls the tempo of the game and supplies most of the scoring chances. But Deco is also a ferocious defender, repeatedly tracking back to win the ball from opponents.

Luis Figo
MIDFIELDER 04.11.72
Internazionale (Ita)
118 caps (31 goals)

Portugal's record caps holder who was persuaded to return to the national team fold having retired after Euro 2004. Has lost much of the pace that made him one of the deadliest wingers in the game, but the 2001 World Footballer of the Year is still an influential figure on and off the pitch.

Hugo Viana
MIDFIELDER 15.01.83
Valencia (Spa)
19 caps (1 goal)

Left-footed midfielder who was hailed as one of Portugal's brightest stars when he broke into the Sporting Lisbon first team at 18. However, he has failed to live up to expectations since moving abroad. In the World Cup frame thanks to a handful of impressive cameos in Portugal's warm-up games.

Maniche
MIDFIELDER 11.11.77
Chelsea (Eng)
29 caps (4 goals)

All-round midfielder who has struggled to adapt to the Premiership but has always performed well in the national team colours and was one of Portugal's heroes during Euro 2004. Has a habit of scoring spectacular goals from outside the area.

Petit
MIDFIELDER 25.09.76
Benfica
34 caps (3 goals)

Nicknamed Pitbull, and for good reason. Petit is a ferocious midfielder whose commitment is unquestioned and whose fiery temperament has earned him a number of red cards. Challenging Costinha for a starting spot as a defensive midfielder.

Tiago
MIDFIELDER 02.05.81
Lyon (Fra)
20 caps (1 goal)

Criticised early in his career for being too ponderous in possession, but the tenacious performer has blossomed into a true midfield maestro, helping Lyon win a fifth straight French League title. Has been compared to Rui Costa, although he plays in a deeper role.

Cristiano Ronaldo
FORWARD 05.02.85
Manchester United (Eng)
30 caps (11 goals)

Explosive, tricky winger whose dribbles give defenders nightmares. Earned a starting spot during Euro 2004 and has been a first-choice ever since. Can turn a game with a flick or a feint and is virtually unstoppable when at full speed.

Helder Postiga
FORWARD 02.08.82
Saint-Etienne (Fra)
21 caps (9 goals)

Has always been part of the Portugal set-up under Scolari despite struggling to hold down a first-team place at club level. Has earned supersub status with the national team thanks to a handful of important goals scored off the bench.

Also in contention

Jorge Andrade's injury created a need for Portugal to find another defender. One of the options, alongside Ricardo Rocha, is **NUNES** (07.03.77; Mallorca, Spa; 0 caps). He showed tremendous tackling ability at Sporting Braga before his move to Spain, where he has been one of Mallorca's best players. Should Scolari use Marco Caneira as a central defender, left-back **JORGE RIBEIRO** (09.11.81; Dinamo Moscow, Rus; 5 caps, 0 goals) should get a call-up, to cover for Nuno Valente. **TONEL** (13.04.80; Sporting Lisbon; 0 caps) is a strong central defender who impressed in his first season with Sporting. Good in the air in defence and attack.

Tenacious, non-stop midfielder **JOAO MOUTINHO** (08.09.86; Sporting Lisbon; 3 caps, 0 goals) has shown incredible maturity for one so young and was voted the most valuable player in the Portuguese League last season, his first as a professional. He could get the nod ahead of Hugo Viana or even Petit.

Attacking midfielder **LUIS BOA MORTE** (04.08.77; Fulham, Eng; 24 caps, 1 goal) missed the cut for Euro 2004 and the same fate looks likely for the World Cup, despite some decent showings at club level. His performances on the wing for Portugal have not impressed Scolari, who has other options for that position.

Nuno Gomes
FORWARD 05.07.76
Benfica
53 caps (23 goals)

Kept his place in the World Cup frame after leading the League scoring chart for several months this season, but Scolari is not one of his biggest fans. Deadly inside the area, but ineffective when playing as a target man on his own up front.

Pedro Pauleta
FORWARD 28.04.73
Paris Saint-Germain (Fra)
80 caps (43 goals)

Portugal's all-time top scorer and the Azores-born forward is known as The Hurricane for his ability to leave defences in tatters. But although he has a stellar goal rate, he has been criticised for not scoring in important matches – Pauleta failed to find the net at Euro 2004, for instance.

Ricardo Quaresma
FORWARD 26.09.83
FC Porto
5 caps (0 goals)

The domestic League's leading assist provider this season, helping FC Porto win another title. A great dribbler and famous for his teasing crosses with the outside of his right foot, but is notoriously unpredictable. Nicknamed The Gypsy because of his family's background.

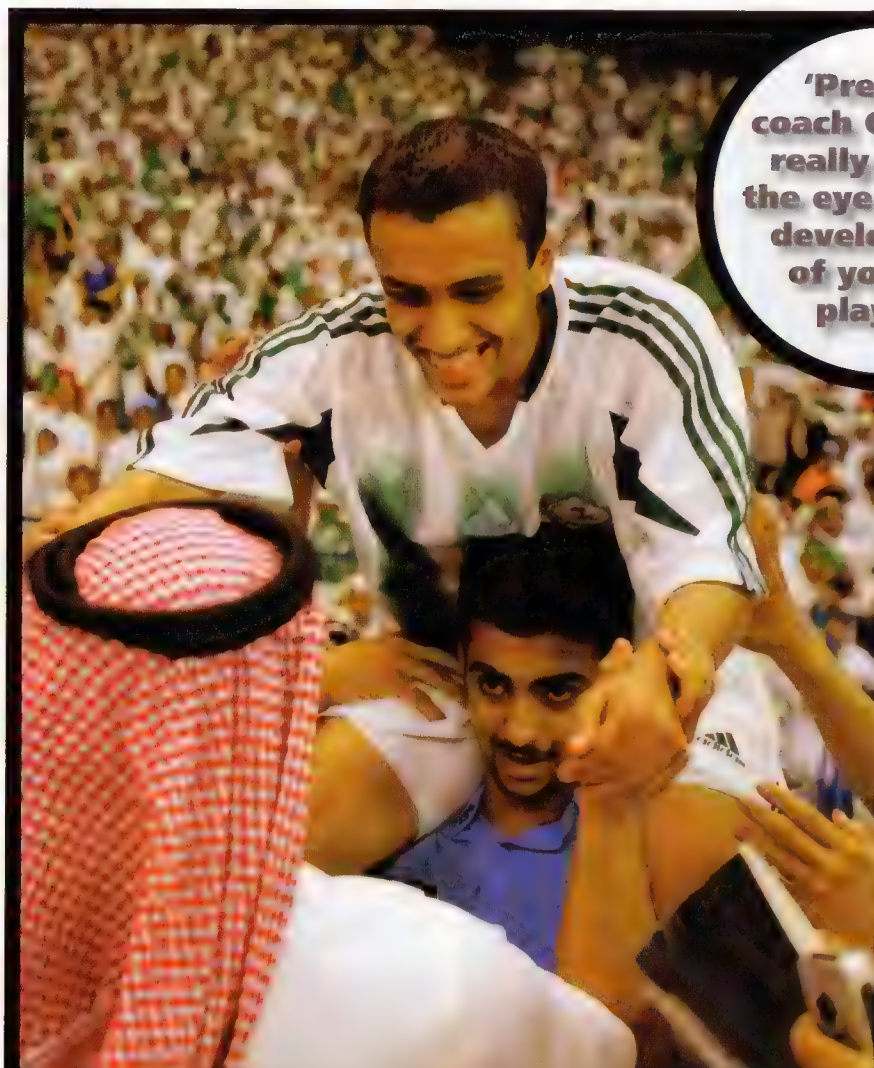
Simao Sabrosa
FORWARD 31.10.79
Benfica
41 caps (7 goals)

Likes to play on the left wing and cut inside in order to shoot with his stronger right foot. Also deadly from set-pieces. Renowned for being a dedicated family man and has the names of his son and daughter sewn into his boots.

SAUDI ARABIA



MICHAEL CHURCH



Carry on, Saudi...midfielder Mohammed Al-Shalhoub is mobbed after the team clinch their finals place last June

'Previous coach Calderon really caught the eye with his development of younger players'

championships in 2003, will benefit from the good work done by his predecessor. The Saudis were in a mess when Calderon took over in late 2004. The young squad were demoralised after their failure to get out of their group at the Asian Cup a few months earlier, the first time the Saudis had not reached the next round at the finals. They also flopped in the group stage at the Gulf Cup that December, Calderon's first tournament in charge. But, surprisingly, he was given time to build, and came up with a team that dominated Group A of Asia's final World Cup qualifying section.

Al-Jaber masterstroke

Calderon convinced veteran striker Sami Al-Jaber to return to international action following his retirement in 2002, a move hailed as a masterstroke, since Al-Jaber played a key role in steering the Saudis to yet another World Cup. But it was the Argentinian's development of younger players that really caught the eye. Yasser Al-Qahtani, who partners Al-Jaber up front for both club (Al Hilal) and country, has blossomed into one of the Middle East's most promising strikers; at the back, Hamad Al-Montashari did enough to earn Asia's Player of the Year award for 2005.

Saudi Arabia's hopes of emulating their achievement of reaching the second round in their debut finals, USA 94, will hinge on that opening game against Tunisia. Three points against their fellow Arabs could be enough to give them the momentum needed to produce decent performances against Spain and Ukraine. But the chances are the European duo will have too much quality for their Asian opponents.

Danger zone

Coach Paqueta goes into the finals knowing his job is on the line

IT IS CUSTOMARY for Saudi Arabia's preparations for a World Cup to be blighted by doubts about the coach. And there's no exception this time. Brazilian Marcos Paqueta was appointed in mid-December after the decision to axe Argentinian Gabriel Calderon – the man who qualified the team for their fourth World Cup in a row – following a poor performance at the inconsequential West Asian Games in Qatar in November.

But with the Saudis struggling in their build-up to the World Cup, the rumours have already been flying about who may be waiting in the wings to succeed Paqueta, who was appointed as a result of his success with Riyadh club Al Hilal. Bora

Milutinovic was one of the names in the frame, while Bruno Metsu ominously took the head coach's job at top Jeddah club Al Ittihad and on only a short-term contract. Anghel Iordanescu, who had steered Al Ittihad to the Asian Champions League title in November, was free of all commitments and, reportedly, was making eyes at the federation.

But for all the speculation and the Saudi FA's famously trigger-happy ways, Paqueta has remained in charge and should be the man to lead the team out against Tunisia on June 14. If that's the case, the Brazilian, who led his country's Under-17 and Under-20 sides to their respective world

SCHEDULE

MAY 11 Saudi Arabia v Belgium (Sittard, Holland)
MAY 14 Saudi Arabia v Togo (Sittard)
MAY 20 Squad reconvenes in Jeddah
MAY 21 Travel to Austria
MAY 26 Saudi Arabia v Czech Republic (Seefeld)
MAY 27 Travel to World Cup base – the Hotel Dolce in Bad Nauheim, 30km north of Frankfurt
MAY 31 Saudi Arabia v Turkey (Offenbach)

WORLD CUP GROUP H

JUNE 14 Saudi Arabia v Tunisia (Munich)
JUNE 19 Saudi Arabia v Ukraine (Hamburg)
JUNE 23 Saudi Arabia v Spain (Kaiserslautern)

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SAUDI ARABIA



TACTICS

SAUDI ARABIA have traditionally played with a 4-4-2 system, and that is unlikely to change under Marcos Paqueta.

Veteran keeper Mohammed Al-Daeyea has returned to the starting line-up in recent months after a period out of the squad and is likely to get the nod ahead of Mabrouk Zaid, who has been the most regular starter over the past two years.

The back four should centre on the defensive strength of Asian Champions League winners Al Ittihad, with centre-back Hamad Al-Montashari marshalling affairs. Club-mate Ahmed Dukhi Al-Dosari looks set to be right-back; Al Hilal's Abdulaziz Al-Khathran is a possibility for the other central position alongside Al-Montashari, though Al Ittihad's Redha Tukar Fallatah is also a strong contender; and Al Ittihad's Manaf Abushgeer could take the left-back spot, despite primarily being a winger.

In midfield, Paqueta is likely to find room for two players from his former club, Al Hilal. Nawaf Al-Temyat is likely to return to the playmaking role, with Mohammed Al-Shalhoub playing on the left flank. Al Ittihad's Saud Al-Khariri should feature on the right, with club-mate Khamis Owairan Al-Dosari a possibility in the centre alongside Al-Temyat.

There is little debate about the front pairing. Sami Al-Jaber is almost certain to start, most likely playing in a slightly withdrawn role behind his Al Hilal club-mate Yasser Al-Qahtani. Talal Al-Meshal gives a greater physical presence up front but hasn't got the mobility of Al-Qahtani.

Marcos Paqueta

COACH 27.08.58



The Brazilian replaced the sacked Gabriel Calderon in mid-December after his impressive spell at leading Riyadh club side Al Hilal. Paqueta won the League and Cup double in his first season, to end a period of dominance by Jeddah club Al Ittihad. In 2003, he steered Brazil's Under-17 and Under-20 sides to triumph in their respective world championships.

Mohammed Al-Daeyea

GOALKEEPER 02.08.72
Al Hilal



The veteran keeper was first-choice at the last three World Cups and is set to fill the role for a fourth time after recently returning to the squad after a wilderness period. Zaid is pushing him hard, but experience should win the day.

Hasan Al-Otaibi

GOALKEEPER 16.10.77
Al Hilal



Long-term understudy to Al-Daeyea at both club and international level and has rarely had the opportunity to prove himself.

Mabrouk Zaid

GOALKEEPER 11.02.79
Al Ittihad



Took over as No 1 from Al-Daeyea after the disastrous 2002 World Cup campaign, but is set to lose out to his rival in Germany. Played a key role in Al Ittihad's back-to-back Asian Champions League triumphs in 2004 and 2005.

Ahmed Al-Bahri

DEFENDER 18.09.80
Al Shabab



Could well get the nod as a defensive reserve having just helped Al Shabab to win the League.

Ahmed Dukhi Al-Dosari

DEFENDER 25.10.76
Al Ittihad



Marauding right-back who won the Asian Champions League with Al Ittihad in November, having joined them from rivals Al Hilal two years ago.

Osama Al-Harbi

DEFENDER 16.05.84
Al Ittihad



Versatile performer who is expected to be a mainstay of the team in the future.

Abdulaziz Al-Khathran

DEFENDER 31.07.73
Al Hilal



Central defender who became a regular starter under Gabriel Calderon and has held down his place since Paqueta's arrival. Won the Saudi Double in 2005 under the Brazilian.

Hamad Al-Montashari

DEFENDER 22.06.82
Al Ittihad



A surprise choice for the 2005 Asian Player of the Year award, getting the nod ahead of South Korea's Park Ji-sung. The centre-back is good at marshalling the defence and has proved a solid performer. This is his first test at a major international tournament.

Khaled Al-Thaker

DEFENDER 14.07.81
Al Hilal



Tough-tackling central defender who has become a regular squad member but rarely gets a start. Won the Double with Al Hilal in 2005.

Hussain Sulaimani

DEFENDER 21.01.77
Al Ahli



One of the few players in the squad who does not come from either Al Hilal or Al Ittihad. The centre-back played at the last two World Cups but has not been a regular choice in recent years.

Redha Tukar Fallatah

DEFENDER 29.11.75
Al Ittihad



Went into the last World Cup tipped to be a defensive rock, but had a nightmare as the Saudis lost 8-0 to Germany and he was held accountable for many of the goals. Tukar has improved since then and should perform adequately, providing he can rid himself of the mental scars.

Saleb Abdullah

MIDFIELDER 21.07.77
Al Ahli



Left-sided midfielder who offers healthy competition for Al-Shalhoub.

Manaf Abushgeer

MIDFIELDER 05.02.80
Al Ittihad



The busy midfielder can also play in defence, and actually seems the likely starter at left-back. Another of Al Ittihad's Asian Champions League-winning squad who has graduated to the national team set-up.

Khamis Owairan Al-Dosari

MIDFIELDER 08.09.73
Al Ittihad



Veteran midfielder who was a first-choice at the last two World Cups and could well feature again this time round. Made the switch from Al Hilal to Al Ittihad several years ago as the Jeddah club sought to wrest power from their Riyadh rivals.

Saud Al-Khariri

MIDFIELDER 08.07.80
Al Ittihad



Right-sided midfielder who has been a member of the Al Ittihad side that have dominated Asian club football for the past two seasons. But despite his commanding performances at club level, he has yet to become a regular for Saudi Arabia. Can also fill in at full-back.

Ibrahim Al-Shahrani

MIDFIELDER 21.07.74
Al Ittihad



Winger with great experience, which could well be enough to earn him a squad place. Scored the goal that took the Saudis to France 98.

Mohammed Al-Shalhoub

MIDFIELDER 08.12.80
Al Hilal



Great things were expected from the slightly-built winger when he burst on to the scene as an 18-year-old at Al Hilal, but he has struggled to meet expectations. Still has the trickery to cause defences problems, however.

Nawaf Al-Temyat

MIDFIELDER 28.06.76
Al Hilal



Crowned Asia's Player of the Year in 2000, but the playmaker subsequently suffered a serious knee injury and has never quite hit his previous heights. His struggle with injury meant he was a long-term absentee from the national squad, and returned only at the turn of the year.

Mohammed Noor Hawsawi

MIDFIELDER 26.02.78
Al Ittihad



Seen by many as the natural replacement for Al-Temyat, and the playmaker has profited from the Al Hilal player's absence through injury, receiving a prolonged run in the national team. Played a key role in Al Ittihad's run to their consecutive Asian Champions League titles.

Also in contention

NAIF AL-QADI (03.04.79; Al Ahli) is in the running to provide defensive cover.

Midfielder SAAD AL-ZAHIRANI (01.07.80; Al Nasr) was in the squad for the 2004 Asian Cup, when the Saudis failed to make it out of their group.

SAAD AL-HARTHI (03.02.84; Al Ittihad) is an up-and-coming striker who has already featured for the national team and would give Paqueta a valuable option up front.

MARZOUQ AL-OTAIBI (07.11.75; Al Ittihad) played a key role in his club's 2004 Asian Champions League triumph, but lost his regular first-team place after Al Ittihad signed former Inter forward Mohammed Kallon. The great goalscoring record of YUSRI AL-BASHAH (27.07.79; Al Ittihad) makes him an obvious possibility, and a call-up would compensate for the shock of exclusion from the 2004 Asian Cup squad.

Mohammed Saad Al-Anbar

FORWARD 22.03.85
Al Hilal



Youngster who is likely to be included in the squad to give him experience rather than with the prospect of playing him. Another to benefit from Paqueta's perceived favouritism towards players from his former club Al Hilal.

Sami Al-Jaber

FORWARD 11.12.72
Al Hilal



Talismanic veteran who returned to the national team in early 2005 having announced his retirement after the last World Cup. Made an immediate impact by scoring in his first game back, a World Cup qualifier away to Uzbekistan, and played a key role in steering the team to the finals.

Talal Al-Meshal

FORWARD 07.06.78
Al Nasr



Strong, powerful front man who offers a physical edge to the Saudi attack that it otherwise lacks. Short on pace and mobility, however, and has struggled with injuries in recent years. Only a peripheral member of the squad during qualifying.

Yasser Al-Qahtani

FORWARD 10.10.82
Al Hilal



Forward with a keen eye for goal who became Saudi Arabia's most expensive player when joining Al Hilal from Al Qadisiya in summer 2004. His availability prompted something of a bidding war, with Al Ittihad also keen to sign him. Seen by many as the long-term replacement for Al-Jaber.

SERBIA & MONTENEGRO

Beware the underdogs

The talented individuals of past tournaments have been replaced by a hard-working collective that could spring a surprise

DARK HORSES was always the tag applied to the former Yugoslavia in the build-up to World Cup finals. Now, as Serbia & Montenegro, everything is different. Qualification for Germany is regarded as an achievement in itself, and only real optimists believe that Dejan Stankovic, Mateja Kezman and co can get past the group stage.

There are two main reasons for this: first, the very difficult draw (Holland, Argentina and Ivory Coast), and second, because the current team have few world-class players.

However, perhaps precisely because of this underdog status, Serbia & Montenegro could exceed expectations in Germany. Not many believe

this will happen, but I am one of them. If Ilija Petkovic's side successfully overcome their first hurdle – by winning or drawing against Holland – they can not only advance to the second round but even reach the quarter-finals.

In the past, the demanding Yugoslav public placed their hopes in the team's talented individuals. A classic example was France 98, when the then Yugoslavia had such players as Predrag Mijatovic, Dragan Stojkovic, Dejan Savicevic, Sinisa Mihajlovic and Vladimir Jugovic. Even neutral observers saw them as a strong team, but they were eliminated in the second round.

Discipline and spirit

Now, in contrast, the team's strong points are tactical discipline, solid defending and great team spirit. Above all, they are a compact unit, with collective play their biggest virtue, rather than dependence on the inspiration of ball magicians.

For once the main man is not a player but the coach. Petkovic guides the team with a mix of fatherly concern and authority. He is an experienced coach and was successful as a player, and has managed to imbue the players with some of his great self-confidence. The following story is indicative of just how confident Petkovic has been throughout his career in football.

In 1968, when he was 22 and still uncapped, he was called up for a European Championship quarter-final against France in Belgrade. The day before the match, national coach Rajko Mitic told the newcomer that he would be in the starting line-up. Petkovic told the coach

not to be worried and that he would score two goals. Mitic was not happy with such a reaction from the rookie, but 24 hours later Yugoslavia beat France 5-1, Petkovic was man of the match... and he scored twice.

Ahead of the finals, the mood in Serbia & Montenegro is one of great excitement: demand for tickets has far exceeded supply, World Cup merchandise is selling well, and the normally poor domestic league attendances have gone up.

One odd anomaly is that Serbia & Montenegro could, in effect, turn up at the finals as two countries rather than one. The political leaders of Montenegro want an independent state, and in a referendum on May 21 the people will decide whether to stay as part of Serbia & Montenegro or go their own way.

But whatever the result, the national team will participate as Serbia & Montenegro and the team will be united in spirit and purpose.



VLADIMIR NOVAK
IN BELGRADE



Tears of joy... Goran Gavrancic and Mateja Kezman feel the emotion as they secure qualification for Germany

'Coach Petkovic has managed to imbue the players with some of his great self-confidence'

'Either Argentina or Holland will not get out of the group'

THE COACH: Ilija Petkovic

What are your chances of reaching the knockout stages?

We had a difficult qualifying group and now an even more difficult finals group. When we started the qualifiers, only a few believed we would win the group. And now it's more or less the same. Everyone thinks our chances are small. However, as I've said many times, we will not give up. We won't be going to Germany just to take pictures, play three games and return home. In each group there are favourites. But some will have to be eliminated. In our group, for example, either Argentina or Holland will not make it to the second round.

What are your strengths?

Probably the attitude of the players. At the start of the qualifiers, nobody believed in them, but they showed great team spirit and proved they were a unit with a strong will to win. The result? They were unbeaten in 10 qualifiers, conceding only one goal.

What about weak points?

What is there to improve? We've played well and achieved good results the way we have been playing. Some people ask me to call up certain new players. But that would be unfair on the players who proved themselves in the qualifying games.

Yugoslav teams traditionally played attacking football. Now some say that this national team is too defence-minded.

Those who claim we play defensively don't understand football. How can a team be defensive if they score 16 goals and concede one? A team must have defensive and attacking qualities, it can't be divided into attacking and defensive players. All 11 players play for the victory.

You seem a lot more optimistic than during the qualifiers. Are you trying to boost your players' self-confidence?

SCHEDULE

MAY 22 Get-together in Belgrade
MAY 23 Start of training camp at Lake Palic, near Subotica
MAY 27 Serbia & Montenegro v Uruguay (Belgrade)
MAY 29 Squad travel to Klagenfurt, Austria, for a training camp at Lake Worthersee
JUNE 4 Serbia & Montenegro v Karnten regional selection (Klagenfurt)
JUNE 6 Travel to World Cup base – the Hotel Weissenburg in Billerbeck, 65km north of Gelsenkirchen

WORLD CUP GROUP C

JUNE 11 Serbia & Montenegro v Holland (Leipzig)
JUNE 16 Serbia & Montenegro v Argentina (Gelsenkirchen)
JUNE 21 Serbia & Montenegro v Ivory Coast (Munich)

Put it this way – what kind of leader would I be if I said we had no chance? We shouldn't be afraid of the finals, we can't give up now with only half the job done. My optimistic statements are not fake, they are not calculated.

Who will win the World Cup?

I am not one to make forecasts. However, there are teams with the ability to cause a big surprise, just like Greece at Euro 2004.



'We didn't qualify by the back door, but through the main gate'

THE PLAYER: Dejan Stankovic

When you watched the World Cup draw you were so furious with Serbia & Montenegro's group that you immediately switched off the TV. Have you calmed down now?

Yes, but I was upset. I was irritated before the draw as well when I learned we would be drawn from a special pot. So when I saw our name next to Holland, Argentina and Ivory Coast, it was a spontaneous reaction to switch off the TV. We were in the most difficult group and I didn't like it. But I thought it over and I started to believe we did have a chance. I'm sure our opponents were not happy when they saw they had drawn a team that finished top of their qualifying group and conceded only one goal in 10 matches.

Can Serbia & Montenegro do well in Germany?

First of all, it must be said that it is already a big achievement to have qualified and, most of all, the way we did it. We did not get through a back door, with luck or through the play-offs; we came through the front door,

through the main gate, as group winners in impressive style. This is especially significant when you consider the situation we were in only two or three years ago, when everyone wrote us off. Now we need to keep both feet on the ground, we don't need to be burdened with high expectations and unrealistic hopes, as was the case in the past. Naturally, our goal is to qualify for the second round.

How did Ilija Petkovic turn things around?

He managed to take the pressure off us. He brought calmness. Before, each time we got together there was big pressure on us. Under Petkovic, the atmosphere became much more balanced.



Then we grew together as a group, as a unit. We have a fantastic atmosphere in the squad, we are focused, concentrated, there is friendship among us, on and off the pitch. The team spirit is our main strength.

Why do you believe the group game against Argentina will be the easiest?

Because they are the superior team, they are favourites, and we have nothing to lose. Also, because I know many Argentinian players very well, several of them are my team-mates at Inter. The matches against Holland and Ivory Coast are our best chance of reaching the second round. Against them we can pick up points, so

anything we achieve against Argentina would be a bonus.

Who will win the World Cup?

Brazil, Italy and Argentina are the three main candidates.

You are very versatile but which position do you prefer?

Left midfield, the position I'm currently playing at Inter.

If you had to compare yourself with another midfielder, who would it be?

Well, that's for others to judge, but I think Emerson is the prototype midfielder. He doesn't always play attractive football, but he finishes the job for the team and is a player of the highest quality. My style of play and my role is similar to his.

SERBIA & MONTENEGRO



TACTICS

ILIJA PETKOVIC used a 3-5-2 formation only once in the qualifiers – the opening day 3-0 win away to San Marino. Otherwise, it was 4-4-2 all the way.

The foundation of the strong defence (only one goal conceded in 10 qualifiers) are central defenders Nemanja Vidic and Mladen Krstajic. But the tireless defensive midfielder Igor Duljaj also plays an important part, as does fellow midfielder Dejan Stankovic, who plays in a more withdrawn role than with Inter. Both the full-backs – Goran Gavrancic (right) and Ivica Dragutinovic (left) – are also very sound defensively but are, in fact, naturally central defenders, and their lack of attacking flair is a serious limitation.

Ognjen Koroman is a very mobile, technically strong right winger, while Predrag Djordjevic is the playmaker.

The best combination in attack seems to be the combative, quick Mateja Kezman and the 2.02m (6ft 7in) target man Nikola Zigic.

The game plan and style of play is certainly not in the Yugoslav tradition. But while the current side is a compact unit with great tactical discipline, it would be an exaggeration to call them a defensive team. They play to win, but they know how to defend a lead. The best example of this came in the home qualifier against a rather harmless-looking Lithuania. With his side 1-0 ahead, Petkovic played the last half-hour with just one striker, and in the event the team won 2-0. Asked to explain his decision, Petkovic replied with the Serbian proverb: "Better a sparrow in the hand, than a pigeon on the tree."

Ilija Petkovic

COACH 22.09.45
Recommended by the team's Lucas, proving himself a shrewd tactician and good motivator when taking over in July 2003. Also seen in action in 14 World Cup and Euro Championship qualifiers. A winner as a player and over 40 caps with Yugoslavia. Was assistant coach to Slodan Santrac at France 98 and won the Swiss League with Servette in 1994.

Dragoslav Jevric

GOALKEEPER 08.07.74
Ankaraspor (Tur)
39 caps (0 goals)
One of the best players during the qualifiers and conceded only one goal in 10 games. Cool under pressure, has great reflexes and increasing self-confidence. His biggest strength is in one-on-one situations. The only Montenegrin in the starting line-up.

Oliver Kovacevic

GOALKEEPER 29.10.74
CSKA Sofia (Bul)
3 caps (0 goals)
Got a national team call-up after good performances with Zeleznik Belgrade in 2002-03 and has retained his status as No 2 to Jevric in spite of being without a club for half a season last year. Very quiet, diligent character. Brought up in Split, Croatia.

Vladimir Stojkovic

GOALKEEPER 28.07.83
Red Star Belgrade
0 caps
Earned a return to Red Star last summer having been sacked in 2002 because of poor discipline and bad behaviour. A great talent and has a lot of potential. First-choice with the Under-21s.

Dusan Basta

DEFENDER 18.08.84
Red Star Belgrade
2 caps (0 goals)
Talented right-back who can also play in right midfield. An Under-21s regular and has generated big expectations, but has yet to make a real breakthrough. Very modest character. Has a look of Pavel Nedved about him because of his long, blond hair.

Nenad Djordjevic

DEFENDER 07.08.79
Partizan Belgrade
15 caps (1 goal)
Solid central defender who can also play at right-back, as he did in the 0-0 qualifying draw away to Bosnia-Herzegovina. Saved Partizan recently in the derby with Red Star (another 0-0 draw) with two clearances off the line. Hard-working and quiet, but really dislikes being a substitute.

Ivica Dragutinovic

DEFENDER 13.11.75
Sevilla (Spa)
26 caps (0 goals)
Central defender who is also strong at left-back. Good positionally and strong in the tackle. Apologised after punching a Sevilla fan who had poked fun at him during a training session. Dragutinovic had not realised that the fan was also a well-known local comedian.

Goran Gavrancic

DEFENDER 02.08.78
Kyiv Dynamo (Ukr)
24 caps (0 goals)
The only outfield player in the squad who spent all 900 minutes on the pitch during the qualifiers. Can play as a central defender, sweeper, defensive midfielder and, as he has shown with the national team, also at right-back. A dangerous free-kick taker at Kyiv Dynamo. Plays piano in his spare time.

Mladen Krstajic

DEFENDER 04.03.74
Schalke (Ger)
44 caps (2 goals)
Excellent left-footed central defender who can also play at left-back. Strong in the air, likes to go forward and gets goals with headers and powerful free-kicks. Prone to defensive blunders, however. Born in Zenica, Bosnia-Herzegovina. The squad's best singer!

Aleksandar Lukovic

DEFENDER 23.10.82
Red Star Belgrade
5 caps (0 goals)
Left-back who played well when given a start as a replacement for the injured Dragutinovic in the 2-0 qualifying win away to Lithuania last October. Has also been in good form for Red Star. Can be quite attack-minded and puts in good crosses.

Nemanja Vidic

DEFENDER 21.10.81
Manchester United (Eng)
19 caps (1 goal)
Outstanding central defender whose steady progress at Red Star Belgrade and then Spartak Moscow was rewarded with a move to Old Trafford in January. Sent off in the last World Cup qualifier and will miss the first finals group game, against Holland.

Predrag Djordjevic

MIDFIELDER 04.08.72
Olympiakos (Gre)
33 caps (1 goal)
The left-footed playmaker is vital for the team's attacking play. Has big international experience, great technique, good vision and takes a superb free-kick. Has scored only once for the national team, though. In contrast, he gets into double figures every season at Olympiakos.

Igor Duljaj

MIDFIELDER 29.10.79
Shakhtar Donetsk (Ukr)
31 caps (0 goals)
Relentless runner and ball-winner who is the team's equivalent of Italy's Angelo Di Livio or Gennaro Gattuso, but is more comfortable on the ball than them. Was flawless as a stand-in right-back in the last qualifier, at home to Bosnia-Herzegovina, and provided the cross for the winning goal.

Sasa Ilic

MIDFIELDER 30.12.77
Galatasaray (Tur)
27 caps (3 goals)
Playmaker with a great instinct for goals, at least at club level, with Partizan and now Galatasaray. Scored in the home World Cup qualifier against Lithuania last September and played well, but was substituted at half-time away to Spain four days later because of his poor showing.

Ognjen Koroman

MIDFIELDER 19.09.78
Portsmouth (Eng)
25 caps (1 goal)
Quick, skilful right winger who was consistently good throughout the qualifying campaign. Played for three Russian clubs – Dinamo Moscow, Kryliya Sovetov and Terek Grozny. At Portsmouth since January, but is not in the starting line-up. A Bosnian-Serb, born in Sarajevo.

Albert Nadj

MIDFIELDER 29.10.74
Partizan Belgrade
41 caps (3 goals)
Central midfielder persuaded to return to the team for the last two qualifiers after a long absence. Got the nod because Petkovic felt he needed an even more compact midfield. Controversially dropped from the France 98 squad, allegedly because he refused to be left-back.

Dejan Stankovic

MIDFIELDER 11.09.78
Internazionale (Ita)
57 caps (11 goals)
Central or left-sided midfielder who always works for the team and is one of the key players. He and Kezman are big friends despite the fierce rivalry of their former clubs – Red Star (Stankovic) and Partizan (Kezman). Now in his eighth season in Serie A. Both parents were footballers.

Simon Vukcevic

MIDFIELDER 29.01.86
Saturn (Rus)
5 caps (0 goals)
Talented, attack-minded left-footer who surprisingly moved to Russia last winter when it had seemed he was bound for a top western European league. Very ambitious, feeling he has a claim on a national team place, but tends to hold on to the ball too long. Grew up in Podgorica, Montenegro.

Zvonimir Vukic

MIDFIELDER 19.07.79
Partizan Belgrade
25 caps (6 goals)
Attacking midfielder who is struggling to be fit after breaking his right foot earlier this year. Had an unhappy spell at Shakhtar Donetsk and was desperate to move to a stronger league. But when he got a chance, at Portsmouth, he made nothing of it. Joined Partizan on loan in January.

Mateja Kezman

FORWARD 12.04.79
Atletico Madrid (Spa)
46 caps (17 goals)
Scored in four straight qualifiers at the end of the campaign but earlier went two and a half years without a national team goal. At club level, hit 100 goals in four seasons at PSV, but then failed to make the grade at Chelsea. Very religious and wears a Saint Sava T-shirt in every game.

Also in contention

Central defender **MILAN DUDIC** (01.11.79; Red Star Belgrade; 11 caps, 0 goals) is a squad regular but mainly plays in friendlies.

MILOS MARIC (05.03.82; Olympiakos, Gre; 7 caps, 0 goals) is a talented, hard-working midfielder, though played only three minutes in the World Cup qualifiers. **NENAD KOVACEVIC** (11.11.80; Red Star Belgrade; 7 caps, 0 goals) is a combative yet also skilful central midfielder and Red Star's captain. Sidelined for almost a year by a heart defect problem, but has rebounded his form. Tall defensive midfielder **DRAGAN MLADENOVIC** (16.03.76; Red Star Belgrade; 17 caps, 1 goal) used to be a regular starter in the national team but has struggled for form after returning to Red Star following a hapless year at Rangers. Impressive attacking midfielder **MILOS KRASIC** (01.11.84; CSKA Moscow, Rus; 0 caps) is a key man for the Under-21s but the World Cup looks to have come too soon.

Forward **NENAD JESTROVIC** (09.05.76; Al Ain, UAE; 12 caps, 5 goals) was top scorer in Belgium with Anderlecht last season but dented his World Cup chances when signing a lucrative contract with Al Ain. This put him out of the European spotlight, though he has maintained his good form. **MARKO PANTELIC** (15.09.78; Hertha Berlin, Ger; 2 caps, 0 goals) has scored a decent 10 goals in the Bundesliga this season after joining Hertha on loan from Red Star.

Danijel Ljuboja

FORWARD 04.09.78
Stuttgart (Ger)
14 caps (1 goal)
The left-footer probably has the best technical ability of any player in the squad but was only a back-up during the qualifiers. Born and brought up in Croatia, moved to France as a teenager and has never played in the domestic league. Adapted well at Stuttgart after a hapless spell at PSG.

Savo Milosevic

FORWARD 02.09.73
Osasuna (Spa)
97 caps (35 goals)
Captain and record caps holder but could well be a reserve in Germany despite having a good season with Osasuna. A World Cup talisman in that he has played in 27 World Cup games – 25 qualifiers and two at France 98 – without a single defeat.

Mirko Vucinic

FORWARD 01.10.83
Lecce (Ita)
3 caps (0 goals)
Talented striker who scored 19 League goals for Lecce in 2004-05. Linked with a move to Roma or Internazionale. His weak point is inconsistency: in one game he can score two goals, in the next he can be invisible.

Nikola Zigic

FORWARD 25.09.80
Red Star Belgrade
10 caps (3 goals)
The 2.02m (6ft 7in) centre-forward was called up in the latter stages of the qualifiers and made a big contribution. He is excellent in the air, has a good goal instinct and is a good team player. A joker off the pitch. Reportedly set to sign for Arsenal.

SOUTH KOREA

That was no fluke!

The Koreans are out to prove their performance of four years ago was not just a result of being joint hosts



MICHAEL CHURCH
IN SEOUL



On a mission...forwards Park Chu-young and Chung Kyung-ho will be aiming to end a Korean jinx

IF EXPECTATIONS IN South Korea are anything to go by, Dick Advocaat and his team will be riding forth into the latter stages of the finals in Germany, just as Guus Hiddink and company did on home soil four years ago.

The spectacular achievement of reaching the semi-finals last time, and the success in Europe of players such as Park Ji-sung and Lee Young-pyo, has given Korean fans the belief that the Taeguk Warriors are now capable of consistently competing with the world's best.

Understandably, Advocaat is much more cautious. Although there has been an air of quiet confidence around the camp over the past few months, the Dutchman is aware that South Korea's first objective is simply to bring to an end the nation's big World Cup hoodoo – the team have never won a finals game on foreign soil, a run of 14 matches over five tournaments.

The Koreans have gone through a period of transition since they lost to Turkey in the third-place play-off four years ago. Of course, Hiddink left the scene, and so did a number of key veteran players. Hong Myung-bo, long considered the most accomplished defender to come out of Asia, has moved into coaching and is currently working as an assistant to Advocaat; Kim Tae-young, Yoo Sang-chul and Hwang Sun-hong have also retired from the national team.

'The team have never won a finals game on foreign soil, a run of 14 matches'

Unlucky Lee

That said, a large part of the 2002 squad remains, and new arrivals such as defensive midfielder Lee Ho have impressed. But, ironically, preparations for Germany have been hit by the loss to a cruciate ligament injury of striker Lee Dong-gook, who also missed out on the Korea/Japan tournament. Lee is unique among Korea's current crop of strikers because of his ability to spearhead Advocaat's three-man attack, and one of the Dutchman's greatest challenges will be to find an adequate replacement.

Whether he can or not, the Koreans will be looking for a winning start against Togo in Frankfurt. Next up are France, who may boast a squad with impressive talent but are not held in awe by Korea. The final group opponents, Switzerland, are viewed as a second-tier European nation whom the Koreans believe are beatable.

Anything more than reaching the second round would probably be too much to ask, but the Koreans are equipped well enough to show that the performances of four years ago were not just a result of having home advantage.

'Guus had the team for six months; we have just two weeks'

THE COACH: Dick Advocaat

What were your first impressions on taking over?

It was important when we arrived to show confidence, even without seeing the team play. The first thing I said when we arrived at the airport – and there were 200 people there, which is unbelievable – was that we have to be positive.

What was your assessment of the squad?

We thought that with all the experienced players – we have six or seven who played at the 2002 World Cup – and

the young talent we could do a job. We said we would try to do the same as Mr Hiddink did, and of course everybody liked that. We have tried to be positive, to the team, to the fans and to the press. That's the reason they like us.

How does the squad compare with 2002?

There's not much difference in quality, but there are two big differences to do with circumstances. First, we aren't playing at home. At home, a little bit of luck can

bring you a lot. Second, we will have much less time working with the squad. Guus had the players for six months solid; we have only two weeks.

There are a lot more youngsters in the squad.

Yes, but if you see what they're doing, it's unbelievable. We have played with a midfield that is made up of players who are 20, 21 and 23. In that respect, I think the team can be as good as the 2002 team, if not better.

Interview by Michael Church

SCHEDULE

MAY 23 South Korea v Senegal (Seoul)
MAY 26 South Korea v Bosnia-Herzegovina (Seoul)
JUNE 1 South Korea v Norway (Oslo)
JUNE 4 South Korea v Ghana (Edinburgh)
Squad then travel to World Cup base – the Schloss-Grandhotel in Bergisch Gladbach, near Cologne

WORLD CUP GROUP G

JUNE 13 South Korea v Togo (Frankfurt)
JUNE 18 South Korea v France (Leipzig)
JUNE 23 South Korea v Switzerland (Hanover)



'We must show 2002 wasn't a fortunate accident'

THE PLAYER: Cha Doo-ri



Are South Korea more respected in Europe since their exploits at the last World Cup?

I'm not sure. A lot of Europeans still can't believe what we did four years ago.

They probably assume it was a one-off because we were playing on home soil. Now it's up to us to show it wasn't a fortunate accident.

You've said hosting the World Cup was a two-edged sword for the Koreans. What did you mean by that?

The tournament was very special for South Koreans. We had the thrill of beating teams like Portugal, Italy and Spain. We went further than any of us had dreamed, and the country went wild. But you can't live on past victories. You have to make a fresh start and look to achieve more. We have more responsibilities since reaching the World Cup semi-finals and have to live up to them.

What are your goals this time?

First, we must qualify for the second round, and it will

not be easy. France have so much talent; Henry, Zidane and Makelele would get into any side in the world. Switzerland showed how good they are by knocking out Turkey. Even Togo have to be respected. It's their first World Cup and they will want to make an impact. But I'm optimistic we'll go through. We've played well against European teams in the past year or so, beating Germany and Croatia and drawing with Greece. Once into the knockout stages, it's about momentum.

What is Dick Advocaat like to work with?

He's very demanding, with a great attention to detail. He comes with a lot of authority but is also open in his dealings with the players. Most importantly, he wants us to play attacking football, to

take the initiative, which suits us perfectly.

Who do you expect to win the trophy?

Like most people, I see Brazil as the team to beat. They just have so many attacking weapons: Kaka, Ronaldinho, Robinho, Ronaldo, Adriano, Juninho and his free-kicks... how do you stop them all? They can only beat themselves, perhaps by becoming over-confident. That's what other countries will be hoping.

Who else could be contenders?

The Italians are always strong, as are the English. Argentina, Holland, Portugal and Germany should also challenge. I know the Germans have had some poor results this season but I would never

write them off. As someone who spent much of his childhood in Germany and has played in the Bundesliga, I know their mentality, and they are not really built for friendlies. In big tournaments when the pressure is on, they usually come into their own. At home and with the crowd behind them, they will be a force.

And the surprise package?

If I can't choose us, I'll go for Mexico, who are very underrated, perhaps Ivory Coast and definitely Australia. We know what a great coach and man Guus Hiddink is. The Australians have some outstanding players and Mr Hiddink will organise the team from top to bottom and get everything possible out of them. I really hope he's successful in Germany.

Interview by Nick Bidwell



SOUTH KOREA



TACTICS

SOUTH KOREA used a 3-4-3 on their way to the semi-finals in 2002 under Guus Hiddink, but Dick Advocaat prefers 4-3-3. Hiddink had experimented with a four-man back line early in his reign, but abandoned it because the players struggled to adapt. Now, though, they look much more comfortable. Lee Young-pyo is at left-back, Choi Jin-cheul and Kim Young-chul in the centre, and Kim Dong-jin at right-back. Lee Woon-jae is still first-choice keeper.

Korea's three-man midfield is likely to be led by Kim Nam-il, with Lee Ho and Lee Eul-yong alongside. The trio will work to dovetail with the front three, which comprises two wide players – Park Ji-sung and Lee Chun-soo – supporting a central striker. Lee Dong-gook, the usual target men, will miss the finals after suffering a cruciate ligament injury, and there are few suitable replacements. Advocaat may well turn to youngster Park Chu-young, who although inexperienced has the knack of scoring important goals.

Dick Advocaat

COACH 27.09.47



Took the reins in September last year and has helped raise the team's confidence after the unsuccessful spell of Dutch compatriot Jo Bonfrère. Advocaat has World Cup experience, having led Holland to the quarter-finals in 1994, and took the Dutch to the Euro 2004 semi in a second spell in charge. At club level, he won League titles with PSV Eindhoven and Rangers.

Kim Young-kwang

GOALKEEPER 28.06.83
Chunnam Dragons
5 caps (0 goals)



Seen by many as Lee Woon-jae's long-term successor and is a regular in the squad, but still has only five caps and clearly would lack experience should anything befall the main man.

Lee Woon-jae

GOALKEEPER 26.04.73
Suwon Bluewings
93 caps (0 goals)



One of the elder statesmen of the team, having also been first-choice at the last World Cup. Has kept hold of the jersey despite pressure from Kim Young-kwang.

Kim Sang-shik

DEFENDER 17.12.76
Songnam Ilhwa
38 caps (2 goals)



Worthy understudy to Choi Jin-cheul in central defence, but can also operate in midfield.

Kim Young-chul

DEFENDER 30.06.76
Songnam Ilhwa
9 caps (1 goal)



Central defender who made his debut last year at the age of 29 when called up by Jo Bonfrère for the East Asian Championship. Advocaat has stuck with him and he is a likely starter.

Kim Do-heon

MIDFIELDER 14.07.82
Songnam Ilhwa
30 caps (4 goals)



Capable youngster who provides good back-up for central midfield.

Kim Nam-il

MIDFIELDER 14.03.77
Suwon Bluewings
64 caps (2 goals)



Has an important role in the team, controlling the tempo of play from just in front of the defence. Tried his hand in Europe after the 2002 World Cup but his spell at Excelsior in Holland did not work out and he returned home.

Song Chong-gug

MIDFIELDER 20.02.79
Suwon Bluewings



One of South Korea's star performers at the 2002 finals, earning himself a move to Europe with Feyenoord. That did not work out, however, and he returned to Korea, with Suwon, in a big-money move. Hampered by injuries in recent months.

Ahn Jung-hwan

FORWARD 27.01.76
Duisburg (Ger)



Has lost his regular starting place after an indifferent year with Metz and now Duisburg. Cold-shouldered by Perugia after scoring the winner against Italy at the 2002 finals and went to Japan with Shimizu S-Pulse and Yokohama F Marinos, with whom he won the League, before returning to Europe.

Choi Tae-uk

FORWARD 13.03.81
Shimizu S-Pulse (Jap)
28 caps (4 goals)



Made just one brief appearance as a substitute at the 2002 finals but likely to see a good deal more action in Germany, though still not a regular first-choice. Has had a successful time since moving to Japan with Shimizu.

Chung Kyung-ho

FORWARD 22.05.80
Gwangju Sangmu
30 caps (6 goals)



Appeared in the World Cup qualifiers and was also a member of the 2004 Olympics squad and the Asian Cup squad of the same year.

Cho Won-hee

DEFENDER 17.04.83
Suwon Bluewings
11 caps (1 goal)



Scored on his debut against Iran last October and has also impressed with his defensive work in subsequent games. Pushing for a starting place.

Choi Jin-cheul

DEFENDER 26.03.71
Chonbuk Hyundai
59 caps (4 goals)



Veteran centre-back and the last of the old guard from 2002 who's still a fixture in the team.

Kim Dong-jin

DEFENDER 29.01.82
FC Seoul
32 caps (2 goals)



Right-sided player who is comfortable in a back three, at right-back or in midfield.

Lee Young-pyo

DEFENDER 23.04.77
Tottenham (Eng)
82 caps (5 goals)



Although naturally right-footed, he has made the left-back berth his own for both club and country. Has flourished since his move to Europe with PSV Eindhoven after the last World Cup. Joined Spurs last summer.

You Kyoung-youl

DEFENDER 15.08.78
Ulsan Hyundai
17 caps (0 goals)



Solidly built centre-back and another player who made his mark under Jo Bonfrère but has retained his squad place under Advocaat. Won the League with Ulsan last season.

Baek Ji-hoon

MIDFIELDER 28.02.85
FC Seoul
10 caps (0 goals)



Up-and-coming 21-year-old who has proved he can be relied upon if necessary this summer.

Lee Eul-yong

MIDFIELDER 08.09.75
Trabzonspor (Tur)
45 caps (2 goals)



One of the unsung heroes of 2002 and has also been quietly successful in European club football, where most other Korean players have struggled. Moved to Turkey after the last finals and has become a stalwart for Trabzonspor.

Lee Ho

MIDFIELDER 22.10.84
Ulsan Hyundai
9 caps (0 goals)



One of the rising stars of South Korean football and tipped to be the long-term replacement for Kim Nam-il in the heart of midfield. Has shown great promise and maturity during friendlies this year and played a key role for Ulsan as they won the League last season.

Park Ji-sung

MIDFIELDER 25.02.81
Manchester United (Eng)
58 caps (5 goals)



Overlooked for the Asian Player of the Year award for 2005, but has proved himself to be the continent's leading player with his exploits in Europe. The workrate and talent he has shown at PSV Eindhoven and now Manchester United make him the man to watch for Korea this summer.

Cha Doo-ri

FORWARD 25.07.80
Eintracht Frankfurt (Ger)



The son of South Korean legend Cha Bum-kun and has found it difficult to emerge from his shadow. Currently with Eintracht Frankfurt, with whom his father won the UEFA Cup in 1980, and his chances of appearing on the World Cup stage in Germany brightened following the injury to Lee Dong-gook.

Cho Jae-jin

FORWARD 09.07.81
Shimizu S-Pulse (Jap)
13 caps (3 goals)



Relatively inexperienced but could make the breakthrough and fulfil his potential to be one of Asia's leading strikers. Cho has already proved his worth in Japan with Shimizu, his goals playing a key part in the club's resurgence.

Lee Chun-soo

FORWARD 09.07.81
Ulsan Hyundai
51 caps (5 goals)



Cocksure, outspoken forward who offered great promise after appearing at the 2002 finals. He failed to shine in two years in Spain, with Real Sociedad and Numancia, but refound his form after returning to Korea, helping Ulsan win the League. Lifted the 2005 Player of the Year award.

Park Chu-young

FORWARD 07.10.85
FC Seoul
7 caps (3 goals)



Korean football's latest young idol. He scored twice in the qualifiers and is in contention for a starting place in Germany following the injury to Lee Dong-gook. Asia's Young Player of the Year in 2004, when he was also the Korean League's Rookie of the Year.

Also in contention

Veteran keeper **CHO JUN-HO** (02.04.73; Jeju United; 0 caps) has yet to make his national team bow, but may be included in the squad as third-choice.

Young defender **KIM JIN-KYU** (16.02.85; Jubilo Iwata, Jap) has shown a rapid improvement since going to the J.League and has done well in the Korea defence when called upon.

Midfielder **KIM JUNG-WOO** (09.05.82; Nagoya Grampus Eight, Jap) attended recent overseas training camps and would fit comfortably into the squad. **JANG HACK-YONG** (24.08.81; Songnam Ilhwa; 3 caps, 0 goals) may also be given a chance.

Lee Dong-gook's injury potentially opens the door for **SEOL KI-HYEON** (08.01.79; Wolverhampton, Eng), despite a disappointing season in England.

SPAIN

This time, surely?

The Spanish feel a trip beyond the quarter-finals is long overdue

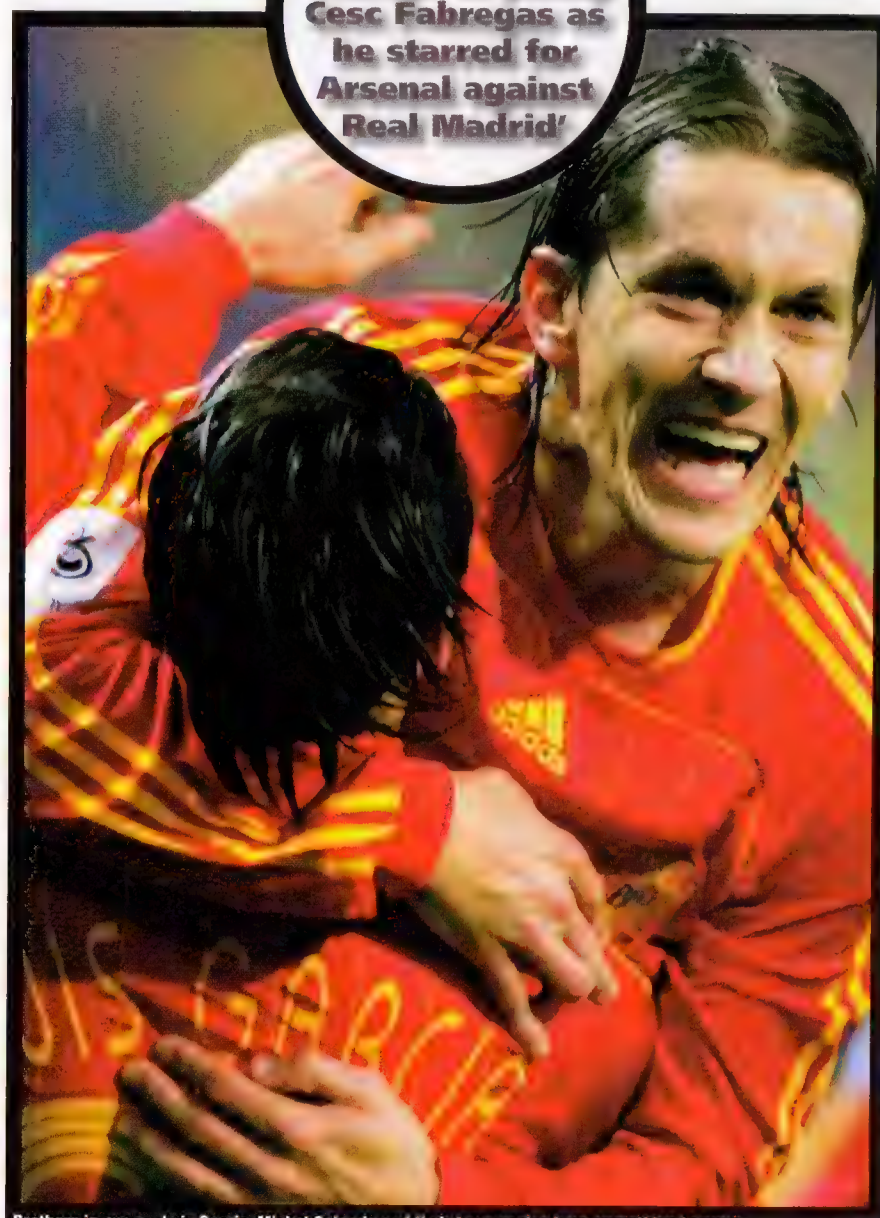
SOME THINGS NEVER change. It's World Cup time again and the Spanish – some of them, at least – are once again vowing that this year, at long last, will be their year. Even coach Luis Aragones is at it, gathering his squad together to announce: "Gentlemen, you're going to get beyond the quarter-finals."

The trouble is, of course, that we have been here

before. And the outcome has always been the same. The words "Spain" and "dark horses" seem destined to go together – rather like "Spain" and "early flight home".

Spain's superiority complex is matched only by their inferiority complex. They're convinced they use the ball better than anyone else, that teams such as England lack

'The public couldn't get enough of young Cesc Fabregas as he starred for Arsenal against Real Madrid'



Brothers in arms... Luis Garcia, Michel Salgado and their team-mates have something to prove

subtlety, while teams such as Italy lack beauty. There is a sense that victory by any means other than neat passing football is illegitimate, but they are equally convinced that fate, or some dodgy plot, will conspire against them.

And so it has proved – or, whisper it quietly, maybe they just haven't been good enough. They have never been in a semi-final (though they finished fourth and bottom of the final, trophy-deciding group in 1950) and they seem to have a thing about the quarter-finals, falling at that stage in 1986, 1994 and 2002. In 1990 they fell a round before and in 1998 they didn't even get out of their group.

Same old hurdle

It particularly hurt in 2002. In the run-up to the tournament, sweaty-pitted national team boss Jose Antonio Camacho demanded that Spain win the World Cup, and yet still they fell at the same old hurdle. Sure, they were robbed by a scandalous refereeing display from Gamal Ghandour; sure, they went out unluckily on penalties. But they had blown the greatest opportunity in their history. They'd had an easy group, needed penalties to defeat the Republic of Ireland and then lost to South Korea.

Some are studiously avoiding talking up Spain for fear of jinxing them, but there is genuine room for optimism this time. Failure to emerge from a group with Tunisia, Ukraine and Saudi Arabia would be a disaster, and a potential second round game against Switzerland will not cause too much trepidation. The problem is that if results go as predicted, Brazil will await in the quarters.

As ever, Spain have the players to do well. In fact, they have greater, more varied options than in 2002. Not only that but many of the players now have experience of different playing styles after joining clubs in other top European leagues. Xabi Alonso, in particular, has become a far stronger, more all-round midfielder since signing for Liverpool, while the Spanish public couldn't get enough of young Cesc Fabregas as he starred for Arsenal in their Champions League tie at Real Madrid.

Valencia striker David Villa is another who could provide Spain with something they have been sorely lacking. The team simply didn't score enough goals against decent sides during the qualifiers. Villa is the top-scoring Spaniard in La Liga, with 23 goals by the end of April and for a club that create relatively few chances. But if you play him, what do you do with Fernando Torres and Raul? The latter has performed dismally over the past three seasons and has yet to make a mark on a major tournament. Aragones is reluctant, but it may be time to drop the captain. That might be what it takes to finally get Spain through the quarter-finals.



SID LOWE
IN MADRID

'Technically, we're in the top six'

THE COACH: Luis Aragones



quarter-finals, and my ambition – and what I am trying to get across to the players – is that we have to meet those expectations, that we will get beyond the quarter-finals. The legend ends here: this time we'll get further.

Is that a key part of your job, making sure the players believe it?

That's the way it has to be. To get through you have to overcome the obstacles – extra-time, penalties, bad luck, and so on. I'm convinced we can, and I think the players are starting to believe it as well.

than not. Either I'll find a psychologist or I'll do it myself – we have to make sure the players take that on board with the greatest conviction.

There are still some big selection debates – for instance, about Raul, because of his poor form.

I'm not so worried about Raul because I am convinced that he will be fine in a month. I know his mind, and I have complete confidence in him. People haven't valued his role in Spanish football highly enough.

What is the situation with Xavi? He still hasn't played a competitive game after his injury.

He's back in training and I think he'll play the final games of the season. We'll watch him and see if he is going to be OK, see how his confidence is,

how quickly he gets tuned in again. I think he's confident. The other day I saw him training on television and he whacked in a cracker of a shot, so I rang him up and said: "Listen sunshine, if you can hit it like that already I don't see why you shouldn't be playing right now."

So, both will be there at the World Cup?

Raul means goals. He's sharp, he sees the chances coming and he was on the point of winning the Serbia game all on his own. Xavi is a key player because of his control, his intelligence and his distribution. But we don't have long to get

everyone fit for the first match, against Ukraine, so we will see.

You have made it clear that Spain will play a technical game, with lots of possession and neat use of the ball.

Yes, because on a technical level Spain are one of the six best teams in the world, whereas physically we are not on the same level as some of the African and European teams. We have the talent. Spain have been at eight consecutive World Cups, and very few countries can say that. People in Spain forget about our footballing history far too easily.

What is your mood going into these final weeks before the World Cup?

I have my feet on the floor, but the greatest of confidence. Everyone is waiting for Spain to do something great, the fans want us to get beyond the

You've always said that the psychological side of the game is as important as tactics or physical shape.

Right now I think it's the most important part. A team that believes it is capable of winning will win more often

'All Spain have lacked is a bit of good fortune'

THE PLAYER: Sergio Ramos

How do you feel going into the World Cup?

Full of desire, desperate to leave a mark. We know that we can't go there thinking we are favourites because there are lots of very good teams, so instead we will go into it with humility. We'll take it one step at a time.

Most people think the draw has been kind to Spain.

Maybe, but even though we have been drawn alongside countries that are less well known, we can't afford to relax. We've seen in recent tournaments that teams that aren't big names have ended

up doing really well. We won't take them lightly, we'll be counting on them being tough opponents.

What do you know about your opponents?

Not very much at the moment, to be honest – but we will learn more about them as the tournament gets closer. We know a bit more about Ukraine because of Andrii Shevchenko and one or two other players.

What have Spain got this time that they have lacked in the past?

Nothing. I think Spain

have always had what they needed. They've had great players at every World Cup and European Championship. The only thing that has been lacking has been that little touch of good fortune.

What makes Spain different to other nations?

I don't think we're different from other countries; we're not special or unusual. We have very good players, but so do the others. There are lots of great teams and each of them has something, or someone, special about them. What we do have, though, is a nice blend of youth and



experience. It's good that we have people who have lived it all before and can help us through, while the younger players can bring that breath of fresh air, a real desire and hunger.

Does it matter that Spain aren't among the favourites?

I think it could be good for us. Let people concentrate on other teams. We'll arrive without that pressure, without people talking about us, and hopefully we can use that to our advantage and do something big. We're determined to get beyond the quarter-finals at last.

SCHEDULE

MAY 22 Training camp in Madrid
MAY 26 Spain v Russia (Albacete)
JUNE 3 Spain v Egypt (Elche)
JUNE 6 Squad travel to Switzerland
JUNE 7 Spain v Croatia (Geneva)
JUNE 8 Squad travel to World Cup base – the Kaiserau sports school in Kamen, near Dortmund

WORLD CUP GROUP H

JUNE 14 Spain v Ukraine (Leipzig)
JUNE 19 Spain v Tunisia (Stuttgart)
JUNE 23 Spain v Saudi Arabia (Kaiserslautern)



TACTICS

AS EVER, Spain's game will be based on possession and patience, but Luis Aragones has yet to settle on a final starting XI or even a formation. The excellent form of David Villa and Fernando Torres, plus the dire form of captain Raul, gives the coach a selection headache up front. Aragones seems to want to play Raul, even if it means switching to a 4-3-3 to accommodate him. That change would cost Spain the width provided by Joaquin and Jose Antonio Reyes (or Vicente if he is fit in time). The coach may ultimately choose to start with Raul and Torres, leaving Villa in reserve.

The defence is settled. Iker Casillas will be in goal, despite the challenge of in-form Santiago Canizares. The back four will comprise Sergio Ramos (or possibly Michel Salgado) at right-back, Carles Puyol and Pablo in the centre, and Antonio Lopez on the left. Asier Del Horno is an alternative to the latter.

The shape of the midfield depends on what happens up front. In a 4-4-2, there would be two wide men (Reyes and Joaquin), with two in the centre (Xavi, if fit, as the creative fulcrum, plus Marcos Senna or David Albelda as a competitive holding player, or Xabi Alonso as a deep-lying ball player). A three-man central midfield is likely to be made up of Xavi, Alonso and Senna. Nonetheless, the claim of Cesc Fabregas builds by the day. If Xavi is not fit, the Arsenal midfielder will slot in easily.

Luis Aragones

COACH 28.07.38
Coached eight clubs, including Barcelona, Valencia and Atletico Madrid (four titles), and was at the helm for a record number of League games, but never won the title. Took charge of Spain after Euro 2004 and is still unbeaten. Famous for his sometimes bizarre behaviour and can be volatile and tricky. Won caps as a striker during his playing days.

Santiago Canizares

GOALKEEPER 18.12.69
Valencia
42 caps (0 goals)
Was to be No 1 at the last World Cup but missed the tournament after dropping a bottle of aftershave and severing a foot tendon. Now firmly behind Casillas in the pecking order. Has had a superb season with Valencia and still dominates his area better than any other Spanish keeper.

Iker Casillas

GOALKEEPER 20.05.81
Real Madrid
56 caps (0 goals)
Nicknamed Saint Iker and is fast becoming the finest keeper in the world. Offers astonishing agility, lightning-quick reflexes and leadership, and has also ironed out his weaknesses when coming for crosses. Spain's penalty hero at the last World Cup.

Jose Reina

GOALKEEPER 31.08.82
Liverpool (Eng)
2 caps (0 goals)
Needed to leave Barcelona for Villarreal to kick-start his career and has since demonstrated his personality and strength at Liverpool. Makes fine saves but really stands out for the sense of security he transmits to his defence. Dominates his area far more than most Spanish keepers.

Antonio Lopez

DEFENDER 13.09.81
Atletico Madrid
8 caps (1 goal)
A solid, if unspectacular performer, who has stolen a march on Del Horno to be first-choice left-back. Can be dangerous from set-plays, having hit some wonderful free-kicks this season, but lacks pace. Back at Atletico, with whom he started, after two successful years at Osasuna.

Asier Del Horno

DEFENDER 19.01.81
Chelsea (Eng)
11 caps (2 goals)
Left-back dropped from the squad recently because he missed the plane from England for a national team get-together. Has had an up-and-down season at Chelsea, too, prompting Jose Mourinho to criticise him publicly. Still Spain's best all-round left-back, but unlikely to start.

Juanito

DEFENDER 23.07.76
Betis
14 caps (1 goal)
Unlikely to start, but did his claims no harm at all by scoring the winner against the Ivory Coast in the recent friendly. A no-nonsense, thrills-free defender who can be dangerous from set-plays.

Carlos Marchena

DEFENDER 31.07.79
Valencia
27 caps (0 goals)
Dependable, unfussy centre-back who was a first-choice for two seasons until Pablo's emergence. Started his career at Sevilla, had a year at Benfica and joined Valencia in 2001.

Michel Salgado

DEFENDER 22.10.75
Real Madrid
49 caps (0 goals)
The classic tenacious, never-say-die full-back who bombs up and down the right wing all game long. Hates losing, even in training, but looks set to lose out to Sergio Ramos with Spain. Once jokingly described as a psychopath by then Madrid player Steve McManaman.

Pablo

DEFENDER 03.08.81
Atletico Madrid
5 caps (1 goal)
An astute reader of the game who has a neat, tidy style but also offers real power, pace and aerial ability. Pablo has performed so well at Atletico that rumours abound of a big-money move to Italy or England. Formerly with Albacete. A quiet character off the pitch.

Carles Puyol

DEFENDER 13.04.78
Barcelona
44 caps (1 goal)
Barcelona's very own Captain Caveman, playing with his heart on his sleeve and his hair in his eyes. Inspirational, strong, quick and gives the Spain team some much-needed bite. Has an undisputed place in the starting XI having led Barca to a second successive League title.

Sergio Ramos

DEFENDER 30.03.86
Real Madrid
8 caps (2 goals)
Still only 20 but has proved himself to be the best of Madrid's signings last summer, a £19m arrival from Sevilla. Offers great pace, strength, determination and leadership. Centre-back (and occasionally central midfielder) at club level but will play at right-back for Spain.

David Albelda

MIDFIELDER 01.09.77
Valencia
32 caps (0 goals)
The Valencia captain is a classic holding midfielder: aggressive, powerful, strong and not afraid to stick the boot in. A key component of Rafa Benitez's League-winning side, even though the pair didn't get on. May lose out to Senna with Spain, however.

Cesc Fabregas

MIDFIELDER 04.05.87
Arsenal (Eng)
1 cap (0 goals)
Announced his arrival when starring for Arsenal at Real Madrid in the Champions League, and the Spanish have been going mad about him since. Made his debut against Ivory Coast in March and did not disappoint. Was viewed as the perfect reserve for Xavi; now many feel he should start.

Joaquin

MIDFIELDER 21.07.81
Betis
36 caps (4 goals)
Recently said his time at Betis may be coming to an end, and what better place to advertise his skills than the World Cup? A chirpy, cheeky scamp and a classic winger, with superb skills and bags of tricks. Top assist-provider in the Spanish League last season.

Marcos Senna

MIDFIELDER 17.07.76
Villarreal
1 cap (0 goals)
The man who underpins the Villarreal midfield, allowing Juan Roman Riquelme the freedom to play, but is more than just a battler. He's neat on the ball, intelligent and shows great tactical nous. Born in Rio de Janeiro, he made his Spain debut in March after acquiring a passport.

Jose Antonio Reyes

MIDFIELDER 01.09.83
Arsenal (Eng)
16 caps (3 goals)
Despite the feeling that Reyes has not quite taken off at Arsenal, he provides electric pace on the left and has performed well for the national team. Will be first-choice if Aragones finally opts for 4-4-2 and Vicente does not recover full fitness.

Vicente

MIDFIELDER 16.07.81
Valencia
38 caps (3 goals)
The key man when Valencia won the League title under Rafa Benitez in 2003-04, with his running and intelligent use of the ball on the left. Has barely played since, the victim of a series of injuries, but is finally getting fit and may even make the starting XI.

Xabi Alonso

MIDFIELDER 25.11.81
Liverpool (Eng)
23 caps (0 goals)
A European Cup winner last season and now fully adapted to the pace of the Premiership in his second season at Liverpool. Intelligent, with a magnificent range of passing and great vision, Alonso can play in a deep midfield role or as a playmaker in front of a holding midfielder.

Xavi

MIDFIELDER 25.01.80
Barcelona
33 caps (1 goal)
Has hardly played this season because of a knee ligament injury but is likely to start in central midfield if fit. Dictates the pace of the game, provides the perfect link between defence and attack, and has a wonderful eye for a pass.

Also in contention

JOAN CAPDEVILA (02.03.78; Deportivo La Coruna; 5 caps, 0 goals) could pip Del Horno to the reserve left-back slot.
Swashbuckling central midfielder RUBEN BARRAJA (11.07.75; Valencia; 43 caps, 6 goals) has rebounded his form at just the right time after a terrible dip. Many commentators are also calling for the inclusion of **ANDRES INIESTA** (11.05.84; Barcelona; 0 caps), who has finally stepped out of Xavi's shadow at Barca, showing control and vision. Both of the above look to have leapt ahead of **GUTI** (31.10.76; Real Madrid; 14 caps, 3 goals), whose hot-headedness appears to have counted against him. Team-mate **IVAN HELGUERA** (28.03.75; Real Madrid; 47 caps, 3 goals) is also likely to miss out, despite having been a first-choice little over a year ago.
FERNANDO MORTIENTES (05.04.76; Liverpool, Eng; 43 caps, 26 goals) has had a disappointing season in England but Aragones is a firm fan and may call him up if he feels Spain need a fifth striker.

Fernando Torres

FORWARD 20.03.84
Atletico Madrid
27 caps (9 goals)
The nearest thing Spain have to Thierry Henry – creates and scores goals, has great pace and superb skill. Almost single-handedly sustains Atletico, the club he has supported his entire life, but there is a feeling he should have moved on to really fulfil his potential.

Luis Garcia

FORWARD 24.06.78
Liverpool (Eng)
7 caps (3 goals)
Has had a rather quiet year at Liverpool compared to his debut season last term, when he hit a string of vital goals on the way to winning the Champions League. But scored a hat-trick for Spain in the World Cup qualifying play-off first leg against Slovenia.

Raul

FORWARD 27.06.77
Real Madrid
92 caps (42 goals)
Captain for club and country, and Spain's all-time leading scorer, but he suffered a knee ligament injury that forced him to miss much of the season and has performed poorly since his return. His starting place with Spain is under threat for the first time and he needs a big tournament.

David Villa

FORWARD 03.12.81
Valencia
5 caps (2 goals)
Has it all: pace, skill, aggression and an incredible eye for goal. La Liga's second top scorer this season and for a side that don't create many chances. His goal celebration is to pretend to pour cider in a long arc, the traditional way of serving this favourite drink of his native Asturias.

SWEDEN

Cracking up?



PENTTI HIETANEN

The defence, a traditionally strong area for the Swedes, looks to be in need of repair

SWEDEN TRAVEL to Germany with a bagful of questions. Will the team finally be able to bridge the gap between honourable mention and ultimate World Cup success? Can they get the most from the exceptional talents of star forwards Zlatan Ibrahimovic and Henrik Larsson? Is there enough strength in depth in the squad?

What is certain is that the party mood, prompted by the qualifying success, has gone flat. Performances in recent friendlies have done anything but boost confidence, and several key players have either been struggling with injuries or have lost form.

Even coach Lars Lagerback, certainly not the most emotional of men, was heard muttering in disgust as Sweden were routed 3-0 by the Republic of Ireland in a March 1 warm-up game.

Unusually, one of the biggest concerns is about the defence. Sweden have a proud tradition of producing classy defenders, from Orvar Bergmark and Björn Nordqvist to Glenn Hysen,

Roland Nilsson and Patrik Andersson. Now, all of a sudden, Lagerback is left trying to decide just who his first-choice back four should be.

Captain and stopper Olof Mellberg has had injury problems, and when he has played recently, he has found his leadership qualities called into question. "Mellberg looked fine when he was just another brick in the wall. But now that he tries to think for the rearguard as a whole, his limitations are too obvious," wrote a columnist in the *Dagens Nyheter* newspaper.

Defensive shape

Sweden's ability to hold their defensive shape even under heavy bombardment has been a key to their success over the years. But not even the flamboyant skills of Ibrahimovic will be enough to save the team if cracks begin to appear in the defensive wall.

The Swedes still have great team spirit and togetherness, with good communication

between coach and players given the utmost importance. There is a real love of planning and discussion in the camp, with everyone invited to have his say. It is an old joke that if a major disaster were to hit the Earth tomorrow, others would run and hide, but the Swedes would form a committee.

While the fans have been calling for a more adventurous approach in matches, Lagerback is certain not to accede. He knows his team inside out and is aware of their strong points. In a recent interview he admitted that, man for man, group adversaries England and Paraguay are probably better, but added: "We will compensate for that with other measures." No prizes for guessing that he meant teamwork and unity.

And at least at this World Cup the Swedes will have no problems with acclimatisation or cultural differences. The area of Bremen in northern Germany where the squad will be based is really quite similar to Sweden. Indeed, the Swedes may never again play World Cup football so close to home.

'Captain and stopper Olof Mellberg has had his leadership qualities called into question'



Problem area...coach Lars Lagerback was disgusted by Sweden's poor performance against the Republic of Ireland

'Ibrahimovic is very easy to handle'

THE COACH: Lars Lagerback



Can Sweden win the World Cup?

If I'm being honest, it is not a realistic target. At our best, we can beat any team in the world, but to go through an entire tournament at such a high level of consistency will not be easy.

So who will win the tournament?

England and Brazil are my top contenders, but no team is unbeatable this time. If you forced me to pick a winner I would go for Brazil as they have so many attacking players.

You mention England being major contenders, so you must be disappointed to be playing them in the group?

Most people say different, but it's a big shame. The media in both England and Sweden looked at the draw overall and viewed it as good news for both nations, but I wanted to avoid England. Also, I see many dangers in facing Paraguay and Trinidad & Tobago. They may be the outsiders, but they cannot be underestimated. We play England last, and I just hope that by then we have six points in the bag.

Who will be Sweden's key player?

I would have to say Zlatan Ibrahimovic is the one we look to for something special. I am sure that he will relish the challenge of the World Cup.

SCHEDULE

MAY 25 Sweden v Finland (Gothenburg)
JUNE 2 Sweden v Chile (Stockholm)
JUNE 3 or 4 Squad travel to World Cup base – the Park hotel in Bremen

WORLD CUP GROUP B

JUNE 10 Sweden v Trinidad & Tobago (Dortmund)
JUNE 15 Sweden v Paraguay (Berlin)
JUNE 20 Sweden v England (Cologne)

Ibrahimovic has a reputation for being difficult to manage. Is that true?

Not at all. I find Zlatan good to work with, he is very easy to handle. Most of the players are good to work with. We don't have too many massive egos in this squad.

How do you feel your preparations have gone?

Well, we had a very disappointing performance in the friendly against Ireland in March [Sweden lost 3-0]. I take the friendly games very seriously and see them as a vital preparation for major tournaments, so that was a missed opportunity.

Are you worried that the performance in Dublin is a sign of things to come?

If we play like that in Germany we will come home very early. We didn't concentrate and made too many mistakes. It was one of our worst performances for many years.

Are you settled on the line-up for the first group game?

I have not made any final decisions. That is why the Ireland game was so important. I wanted to finalise a few ideas in my mind, but the game didn't help too much in that respect.

Interview by Kevin Palmer

'It's not right to say we're boring'

THE PLAYER: Olof Mellberg

How do you assess Sweden's World Cup preparations?

We obviously had a big setback when we lost 3-0 to Ireland in March. They played very well, but that was not a normal performance from Sweden. We have rarely turned in such a below-par display, so it was a bit of a shock and we have to bounce back to prove we are a good side.

What are Sweden's strengths?

You have to look at our consistency. We tend to play a solid game, and then we have Zlatan Ibrahimovic and Henrik Larsson, who can turn a match at any moment. There is also good continuity in the camp as we have had the same coach for a long time.

How do you view your game against England?

We also played them at the last World Cup, but this time it is likely to mean something different as it is

the final game in the group. Last time it was the first game and all the focus was on it. No one knows what the situation



will be by the time we play England, so it's vital we focus on Paraguay and Trinidad & Tobago for now.

What do you know about Trinidad & Tobago?

Not too much, though I believe most of their players are based in England. It will be interesting to play them because that will be something new for all of us. It is the sort of game you want in a World Cup, something different from what you are used to.

How do you answer the critics who call Sweden a boring team?

Just because we are well-organised and defend well does not mean we are negative. I don't see how a side that has Larsson and Ibrahimovic up front can be

described as boring. We are trying to add a little more attacking intent to our team now, and you could see that in the qualifying campaign. But you can never satisfy everyone all the time. For me, criticising Sweden for what we have achieved in the past few years is not right because we have done very well for a small country.

Is there a lot of pressure on Ibrahimovic to turn on the style in Germany?

Zlatan is used to pressure by now. He has had a very tough season with Juventus, so I just hope he has enough left in him to have a final push at the World Cup. People must remember he is still a young guy learning this game, and maybe we expect too much from him sometimes.

Interview by Kevin Palmer



TACTICS

SWEDEN STILL RELY on a 4-1-3-2 formation, in spite of demands for a more open 4-3-3. Forwards Henrik Larsson and Zlatan Ibrahimovic did so well together at Euro 2004 that the temptation to repeat the act, and not add another front man to the mix, was clearly too strong.

Andreas Isaksson is the undisputed first-choice keeper. Captain Olof Mellberg is a storming stopper and is likely to have veteran Teddy Lucic alongside him in central defence. Erik Edman will take the left-back berth providing he is fit. The right-back position has been a problem lately, and there are at least three players vying to fill it. Christoffer Andersson seems to have as good a chance as any.

The anchor position in midfield will go to Tobias Linderöth. The onus is on the wide midfielders to shift the play swiftly from defence to attack. Lars Lagerback has plenty of options for these positions, including Christian Wilhelmsson, Freddie Ljungberg, Johan Elmander and Mattias Jonson. Anders Svensson's good understanding with Ljungberg, who's likely to play on the left, may well get him the nod as the creative central midfielder. However, Kim Kallstrom is six years younger than Svensson and in good form at club level. If neither Svensson nor Kallstrom deliver, Ljungberg can be moved to the centre, where he can use his pace to run into the spaces behind the opposition defence.

Even Larsson could be used in the hole behind the front line, or moved to play wide on the right, where he has often operated for Barcelona.

Lars Lagerback

COACH 16.07.48

Joined the FA in 1990 as a youth team coach, and acted as a "spy" on opponents during the 1994 World Cup, when Sweden finished third. Took joint command of the national team in 2000 with Tommy Soderberg. Has been in sole charge since the end of Euro 2004. A sharp analyst of opponents and a firm believer in team unity and continuity.

John Alvborge

GOALKEEPER 10.08.82

Viborg (Den)
1 cap (0 goals)



Former Under-21 international who made his senior team debut only this spring. Athletic and adequate at the basics, but will only be given a chance in Germany in a dire emergency.

Eddie Gustafsson

GOALKEEPER 31.01.77

Lyn Oslo (Nor)
8 caps (0 goals)



A former youth prodigy with Norrköping, but has somehow failed to make his breakthrough at senior level. An agile performer with nimble feet, but still short of top-class experience. Born in Philadelphia and is a Buddhist.

Andreas Isaksson

GOALKEEPER 03.10.81

Rennes (Fra)
38 caps (0 goals)

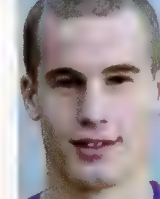


The undisputed No 1 and perhaps Sweden's only international quality keeper, making his recent knee problems a worry. Tall, calm, with a long reach and safe handling. Not so swift with his feet, though. Joined Rennes after Euro 2004 having won two League titles with Djurgårdens.

Christoffer Andersson

DEFENDER 22.10.78

Lilleström (Nor)
24 caps (0 goals)



A quick overlapping right-back, but seemingly unable to shake off his image as an eternal fringe man, six years after his full international debut. Even so, he may well be a starter in Germany. Has done well in Norway after leaving cash-strapped Helsingborgs in 2003.

Mikael Dorsin

DEFENDER 06.10.81

Rosenborg (Nor)
9 caps (0 goals)



Originally a midfielder but has been used mainly as a reserve for Edman at left-back. A faultless passer and has plenty of energy, but still hasn't quite lived up to his early promise. Learned to become a cook before turning full-time as a professional player.

Erik Edman

DEFENDER 11.11.78

Rennes (Fra)
35 caps (1 goal)



Naturally left-sided player who solved Sweden's long-standing left-back problem. A spell at Tottenham did not work out, and he has had injury problems at Rennes, so is struggling to be fit for the finals.

Petter Hansson

DEFENDER 14.12.76

Heerenveen (Hol)
12 caps (0 goals)



A popular central defender who won the Swedish League with Halmstad in 2000 and is now an effective performer in Holland. Can also play in midfield. His powerful style once earned him the nickname White Tornado from the Dutch press. A bit slow on the turn, though.

Teddy Lucic

DEFENDER 15.04.73

Hacken
80 caps (0 goals)



Venerable veteran who is versatile enough to play in any defensive position. Has found a new lease of life at unheralded Hacken following largely unproductive spells at Leeds and Bayer Leverkusen. His father came from Croatia and his mother from Finland.

Olof Mellberg

DEFENDER 03.09.77

Aston Villa (Eng)
62 caps (2 goals)



Sweden's skipper is known for his strength and determination and has become a pivotal figure in the national team. The central defender has excellent aerial ability, is a tough tackler and also offers good distribution. Joined Villa in 2001 from Racing Santander.

Alexander Ostlund

DEFENDER 02.11.78

Southampton (Eng)
22 caps (0 goals)



"Salle" was a teenage prodigy as a forward at AIK Stockholm and even had a spell in Portugal in that position. Converted to a right-back after returning to Sweden and starred in the Euro 2004 quarter-final against Holland. Has been struggling for a game at Southampton.

Niclas Alexandersson

MIDFIELDER 29.12.71

IFK Gothenburg
85 caps (7 goals)



Another veteran enjoying an Indian summer back in Sweden after time abroad. A well-balanced player, whose passing and shooting are of the highest order. Normally plays wide on the right, but can also operate on the left or even at right-back. Has never been booked.

Daniel Andersson

MIDFIELDER 28.08.77

Malmö
46 caps (0 goals)



The younger brother of former Sweden defender and captain Patrik Andersson. Played for four Italian clubs in a six-year period, then returned to Sweden, with Malmö, in 2004 and immediately won the League. Offers great commitment and good distribution in central midfield.

Johan Elmander

MIDFIELDER 27.05.81

Brøndby (Den)
17 caps (7 goals)



Hailed as a wonderkid when he burst on to the scene as an 18-year-old forward with Örgryte. But a spell with Feyenoord came to nothing. Career has picked up since joining Brøndby. Now often plays as a right-sided midfielder. Has a good turn of pace and is physically imposing.

Kim Kallstrom

MIDFIELDER 24.08.82

Rennes (Fra)
32 caps (4 goals)



Touted as Sweden's new midfield general but has still to prove himself in that role. Strong, passes well with either foot and can be a threat with his long-range shooting. Also a dead-ball specialist. Joined Rennes in 2003 after twice winning the Swedish League with Djurgårdens. A golf fanatic.

Tobias Linderöth

MIDFIELDER 21.04.79

FC Copenhagen (Den)
56 caps (1 goal)



A very respected midfield troubleshooter who is heading for his fourth consecutive major tournament. A tireless, big-hearted type, but his attributes were not fully appreciated during a spell at Everton. It's a different story at Copenhagen.

Fredrik Ljungberg

MIDFIELDER 16.04.77

Arsenal (Eng)
56 caps (12 goals)



One of Arsene Wenger's first signings at Arsenal, and among his best. Ljungberg has sometimes disappointed in the national team, but had a great World Cup qualifying campaign. Makes clever runs from deep positions, and has great speed and finishing. A Calvin Klein underwear model.

Anders Svensson

MIDFIELDER 17.07.76

Elfsborg
65 caps (13 goals)



Now back in Sweden from Southampton. The free-kick specialist hit the winner against Argentina at the last World Cup. Often plays wide on the left for his club but prefers a central role with the national team. Married to a model and is a sharp dresser himself.

Christian Wilhelmsson

MIDFIELDER 08.12.79

Anderlecht (Bel)
27 caps (2 goals)



A quick, right-sided midfielder who is adept at dribbling past opponents and putting in accurate crosses. Lacks defensive application, however. Joined Anderlecht in 2003 from Norwegian side Stabæk and has been one of the Belgian side's best players.

Marcus Allback

FORWARD 05.07.73

FC Copenhagen (Den)
55 caps (23 goals)



No longer a first-choice, but still good for a goal when given the nod. Strong in the box, has a crisp shot and reacts quickly to half-chances. Often acts as a spokesman for the players. Father Stefan is known as Mr Örgryte after a lifelong connection to the Gothenburg club.

Also in contention

Sweden are still desperate to find an experienced keeper to provide cover for Isaksson so **BENGT ANDERSSON** (11.08.66; IFK Gothenburg; 11 caps, 0 goals) or former Arsenal player **RAMI SHAABAN** (30.06.75; Fredrikstad, Nor; 0 caps) could still get a place in Germany.

Sturdy central defender **MAX VON SCHLEEBRUGGE** (01.02.77; Hammarby; 4 caps, 0 goals) is one of the names in the frame, as is **KARL SVENSSON** (21.03.84; IFK Gothenburg; 1 cap, 0 goals), an exciting prospect who has been touted as the new Glenn Hysen. Former Djurgårdens left-back **FREDRIK STENMAN** (02.06.83; Bayer Leverkusen, Ger; 1 cap, 0 goals) could still make the trip, especially with Edman's fitness in doubt. **MIKAEL NILSSON** (24.06.78; Panathinaikos, Gre; 25 caps, 3 goals) would be an automatic choice at right-back but has only just returned to action after a six-week lay-off with knee problems.

DUSAN DJURIC (16.09.84; Halmstad; 3 caps, 0 goals) is rated as one of the Swedish League's best young midfielders, while the experienced, versatile **YKSEL OSMANOVSKI** (24.02.77; Malmö; 13 caps, 2 goals) has shown a renewed appetite for the game since rejoining Malmö.

Forward **STEFAN SELAKOVIC** (09.01.77; IFK Gothenburg; 12 caps, 4 goals) is fast, mobile and a good finisher. Has recently been involved in an investigation into alleged tax evasion, but is still eligible for the World Cup.

Zlatan Ibrahimovic

FORWARD 03.10.81

Juventus (Ita)
37 caps (18 goals)



The current Swedish Player of the Year. He beats defenders with ease, has a superb first-time touch and is quite fast and agile for such a tall man. Also arrogant and has a short fuse. Has Bosnian roots — his mother is a Croat and father a Muslim — but grew up in Malmö.

Mattias Jonson

FORWARD 16.01.74

Djurgårdens
52 caps (9 goals)



Veteran who can play on either side of midfield or as a supporting forward. A gritty foot soldier who still offers good pace and workrate as well as tactical discipline. Spent a season in England with Norwich after Euro 2004; then returned to Sweden and won the League with Djurgårdens.

Henrik Larsson

FORWARD 20.09.71

Barcelona (Spa)
88 caps (34 goals)



One of Europe's top marksmen over the past 15 years. Became a Celtic legend by scoring 242 goals in 315 matches. Joined Barcelona after Euro 2004 and has since overcome a horrendous injury. Plans to return to Helsingborgs, his former club, after the World Cup.

Markus Rosenberg

FORWARD 27.09.82

Ajax (Hol)
7 caps (3 goals)



A lot is expected of this skilful, pacy forward, although he is still playing second fiddle to Ibrahimovic-Larsson. Made his name in 2004 at Halmstad, to whom he had been loaned after failing to get a starting place at Malmö. Joined Ajax last summer.

SWITZERLAND

Going nuts for Nati

A youthful, more inclusive national team are exciting Swiss fans and media alike

SWITZERLAND, A LAND in love with Alpine sports and where the average attendance in the domestic league this season is less than 8,000, can, on the surface, seem to be inoculated against the so-called beautiful game. Not so. At the moment World Cup fever is endemic here.

Every branch of the media simply cannot talk enough about the national team, shops and manufacturers have been relentlessly plugging their World Cup-related goods, while all over the country youngsters and adults alike are enthusiastically collecting Panini Germany 2006 stickers. The Swiss

market accounts for 10 per cent of the Italian company's worldwide sales.

Whether in possession of a ticket or not, thousands of Swiss fans are likely to cross the border into Germany this summer, and for those who cannot make the trip, big screens will sprout up all over to provide live feeds of the action.

The passion is understandable. The World Cup is virtually on their doorstep and, after all, this is only Switzerland's third World Cup in 40 years.

Swiss footballing culture has been transformed in the past 15 years. The national team, *Nati*, has

been beset by linguistic difficulties for most of its 100-year history, with the country's German-speaking region largely calling the shots and the French and Italian communities complaining of discrimination. That all ended in the late 1980s with the appointment of two foreign national team coaches, first German Uli Stielike and then England's Roy Hodgson. Ability rather than mother tongue became the only selection criterion.

These days the team is even more inclusive, featuring many examples of what the Swiss call *Seconda*, the sons of immigrant parents such as centre-back Philippe Senderos (of Spanish-Serb stock) and midfielders Ricardo Cabanas (Spanish), Tranquillo Barnetta (Italian) and Valon Behrami (Kosovan).

Youth development

The other major sea-change stems from the federation's decision in the mid-1980s to seriously invest in youth development. Fifteen years on, Swiss age-group sides have established themselves among the best in Europe, notably winning the Under-17 European Championship in 2002. Two of that side, Senderos and Barnetta, are now fully-fledged senior internationals.

To a large extent, today's *Nati* reflects the ethnic diversity of its players. The team put together by coach Kobi Kuhn is a marriage of Germanic discipline, an Italian-style tactical awareness and ability to strike on the counter-attack, and a French/Mediterranean short-passing game.

Switzerland, a compact, well-drilled side of indomitable spirit, will not win any prizes for artistic impression this summer. But they will be hard to beat and have good reason to believe they will qualify from a less-than-onerous group, which also includes France, South Korea and Togo.

That would probably satisfy the majority of fans and media, many of whom see this World Cup as the appetiser for the Euro 2008 main course, which the Swiss and Austrians will jointly host.

Anything better than a last-16 place will be a bonus. The Swiss are too dependent on striker Alex Frei for goals, their full-backs and goalkeeper are not of the highest calibre, and they are rather one-dimensional in midfield, high on graft, low on craft.

Whatever transpires, Kuhn is most unlikely to have the Swiss public baying for his blood. Modest, homely and jovial, he is one of the country's own. In these parts, you do not attack national treasures.



NICK BIDWELL
IN ZURICH



Main man... Alex Frei is the chief supplier of Swiss goals

'The Swiss will not win prizes for artistic impression, but they will be hard to beat'

'We can make a lot of people very happy this summer'

THE COACH: Jakob Kuhn



What do you think of your group?

People may look at the games against South Korea and Togo and say Switzerland

should win, but we cannot underestimate those teams. France must be the favourites to win the group, but we have a chance to progress. It is a bonus to be here talking about this World Cup, as we have a young team that I felt might not be ready to compete in a major tournament until 2008.

So, given the age of the team, were you surprised that they managed to cope with the pressure in the final qualifying games?

Pleased more than surprised. We had to come through a tough test against Ireland [in the final group game, a 0-0 draw] and then the play-off against Turkey.

The players handled the pressure so well that it can only stand us in good stead for the future. They have already proved a lot, and these players are capable of making an impact in Germany. The fact the tournament is so close to home must be an advantage for us. We can make a lot of people very happy this summer.

You know plenty about France since you played them in the qualifying group. Are you frustrated to be drawn against them again in the finals?

Well, we don't need to learn too much about them. [France coach] Raymond

SCHEDULE

MAY 23-JUNE 7 Training camp at Feusisberg
MAY 27 Switzerland v Ivory Coast (Basle)
MAY 31 Switzerland v Italy (Geneva)
JUNE 3 Switzerland v China (Zurich)
JUNE 8 Squad travel to World Cup base – the Kurhotel Furstenhof in Bad Bertrich, south of Bonn

WORLD CUP GROUP G

JUNE 13 Switzerland v France (Stuttgart)
JUNE 19 Switzerland v Togo (Dortmund)
JUNE 23 Switzerland v South Korea (Hanover)

Domenech and I looked at each other at the draw and just smiled, as if we were both expecting it.

You have not played many warm-up games. Is that a concern?

With so many players playing in all parts of Europe, it was decided that we would focus on getting them together for a month before the tournament. That will be enough time to get our ideas finalised, and it means the players can focus on their club football until then.

How tough is your job when you have your players spread all over Europe?

I will not be the last Switzerland boss to suffer from this problem, but it is a good sign that we have a lot of players playing in the top European leagues. If they are good enough to play there, they must be ready for this World Cup.

Would you swap success at this World Cup for glory on home soil in Euro 2008?

At this moment I would say no. We have qualified for this tournament and have earned the right to be there, so let's go to Germany and see what we can do. Now that we are here, we have to achieve some success.

Interview by Kevin Palmer

'France know we'll be tough opponents'

THE PLAYER: Philippe Senderos

Do you see France as group favourites?

Certainly, they are the team to beat, but then again, they failed to beat us in either of our qualifying ties and know we will be tough opponents.

How do you feel about playing against Thierry Henry, your Arsenal team-mate?

He is a special player and you never know what he is going to do next. In training every day he comes up with new ideas all the time.

Your coach has said he is more focused on Euro 2008 than this World Cup.

We are a good side now, but I'm sure he means we will be even stronger when we are the host nation for the Euros. I hope he is right.

Swiss players are scattered all over Europe. Is this a good thing?

I don't want to be disrespectful to the Swiss League, but if you want to play top football every week, you have no option other than to look somewhere else. The national team get the benefit from that because when you go away at a young age, maybe before you are 20, it means you can learn the game at a high level.

How has international football helped your development?

I have played with the national team since I was 16 and that has opened doors for me to play in other countries at top level. Not too many scouts come to watch Swiss League games, but when you are playing international football, they take notice.

How much has being at Arsenal helped your career?

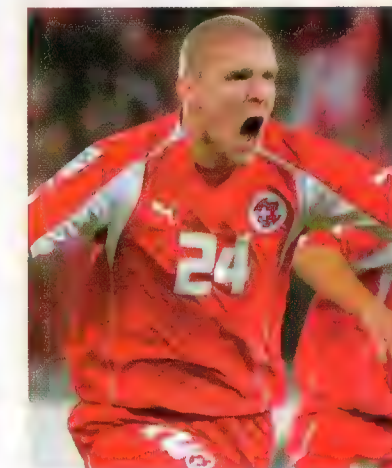
Arsene Wenger is obviously one of the best coaches in the world, and the back four has performed so well together lately. Our self-belief is growing all the time.

This is a young Switzerland team. Will you have enough experience to cope with playing at the World Cup?

Definitely. We proved in the qualifiers we are developing quickly. Switzerland have put a lot of effort into the youth development programme in recent times, and now we are seeing the rewards.

Did coming through the tense play-off in Turkey boost the team's confidence?

That type of experience can only be good for a young team. There was great pressure from the crowd in Turkey, but we are a side that work for each other.



How important is Kobi Kuhn to the team's success?

The young players in the squad have grown up with him because he was the Under-21 coach, and he knows their game better than anyone. We all have great respect for him. He makes you feel he has total faith in you, and that is always a confidence boost.

Interview by Kevin Palmer

SWITZERLAND



TACTICS

KOBI KUHN is nothing if not a pragmatist. He has only a limited number of international-class players to pick from and a large sprinkling of youngsters in his squad, so the only way he was ever going to make the "Nati" competitive was by preaching organisation and solidarity.

In the compact 4-4-2 he usually employs, every player's role is very clearly defined. The problem Switzerland may have in the group games is that they are set up to play on the counter. That will be fine against France, but what if they need to take the initiative against South Korea or Togo?

Despite recent mistakes, Patrick Zuberbuhler remains the No 1 keeper. The back four will be built around the oldie-rookie central defensive partnership of Patrick Muller and Philippe Senderos, with Boris Smiljanic, Stephane Grichting and Johan Djourou as back-ups. Philipp Degen has a clear lead over Valon Behrami in the race for the right-back spot, but the fight for the left-back position, between Ludovic Magnin and Christoph Spycher, is much tighter.

In midfield Johann Vogel (central) and Raphael Wicky (left) do the thankless chores, Tranquillo Barnetta (or Behrami) on the right combines defensive and creative duties, and the mobile Ricardo Cabanas pulls the strings. If Hakan Yakin recovers fitness and form, he could yet make an eleventh-hour rush for the playmaker berth.

Alexander Frei and Marco Streller are the first-choice strikers. The versatile Daniel Gyax is likely to see some action in some attacking role or other. Johan Vonlanthen is likely to be used as an impact player from the bench.

Jakob Kuhn
COACH 12.10.43

A Swiss football legend. He was probably the country's best midfielder of all time, claiming six league titles with FC Zurich and winning 52 caps. Had 12 years in charge of the nation's junior sides before taking the senior team reins in 2001. A perfectionist, calm, a good communicator and has a dry sense of humour.

Fabio Coltorti
GOALKEEPER 03.12.80
Grasshopper
1 cap (0 goals)

Fast-improving keeper whose excellent shot-stopping and command of his box made him a key element in Thun's surprise runners-up finish in the Swiss League last season. Promptly moved on to Grasshopper. His kicking needs attention.

Eldin Jakupovic
GOALKEEPER 02.10.84
Lokomotiv Moscow (Rus)
0 caps

Thun would not have got into the Champions League group stage this term without Jakupovic's acrobatic diving stops, bravery and calmness under pressure. Signed for Lokomotiv Moscow in January. Has dual Swiss-Bosnian nationality and has played at Under-21 level for both countries.

Pascal Zuberbuhler
GOALKEEPER 08.01.71
Basle
37 caps (0 goals)

Unpredictable first-choice, just like predecessor Jorg Stiel. One moment "Zubi" can produce a stunning reflex save or make a brave intervention at a forward's feet, the next he can make a crass error. He should also dominate more at crosses. Loves to puff on a cigar in moments of celebration.

Valon Behrami
DEFENDER 19.04.85
Lazio (Ita)
4 caps (1 goal)

Enterprising, lively right-back or right-sided midfielder with a good tactical brain for one so young. Born in Kosovo but left the troubled region for southern Switzerland when he was four. Considered appearing for Albania but finally chose his adoptive homeland.

Philipp Degen
DEFENDER 15.02.83
Borussia Dortmund (Ger)
12 caps (0 goals)

Young attack-conscious right-back making a name for himself with Dortmund following a free transfer from Basel last summer. Tireless in support of the attack and crosses well. Weak points are his heading and positional play.

Johan Djourou
DEFENDER 18.01.87
Arsenal (Eng)
1 cap (0 goals)

Physically imposing, level-headed young central defender or defensive midfielder who starred for the Swiss Under-19s as they reached the 2004 European Championship semis. Joined Arsenal from Geneva club Etoile Carouge in 2004. The son of a Swiss mother and Ivorian father.

Stephane Grichting
DEFENDER 30.03.79
Auxerre (Fra)
3 caps (0 goals)

Robust, diligent centre-back who can also operate at left-back but is a little short on technical polish for that role. Hospitalised with a groin injury after being attacked by Turkish players at the end of the qualifying play-off second leg in Istanbul.

Ludovic Magnin
DEFENDER 20.04.79
Stuttgart (Ger)
27 caps (2 goals)

Left-back or wing-back of much poise and adventure. Has great stamina, is intensely competitive and takes a mean free-kick, but also injury-prone. Won the Double in Germany with Werder Bremen in 2004; joined Stuttgart last year.

Patrick Muller
DEFENDER 17.12.76
Lyon (Fra)
62 caps (3 goals)

A stylish, intelligent centre-back with good aerial ability but lacks pace. Now in his second spell at Lyon following periods at Mallorca and Basel but has largely been on the bench. Started out as a left-sided midfielder or forward with Servette and Grasshopper. Born in Austria.

Philippe Senderos
DEFENDER 14.02.85
Arsenal (Eng)
10 caps (2 goals)

Injuries and patchy form marred the young centre-back's first two years at Arsenal following a move from Servette in 2003. But he has been outstanding over the past few months, strong in the tackle, durable and quick to recover and make last-ditch blocks. Has a Spanish father and Serb mother.

Boris Smiljanic
DEFENDER 28.09.76
Basle
3 caps (0 goals)

No-nonsense, experienced central defender enjoying something of an Indian summer to his career. Spent eight years with Grasshopper before moving to Basel in 2003. Basel boss Christian Gross calls him a "colossus".

Christoph Spycher
DEFENDER 30.03.78
Eintracht Frankfurt (Ger)
19 caps (0 goals)

Diminutive left-sided full-back or midfielder who is very combative and supports the attack well. Rather one-paced, however. With Lucerne and Grasshopper before switching to the Bundesliga last summer. A serious, reserved character keen to keep a low profile off the field.

Tranquillo Barnetta
MIDFIELDER 22.05.85
Bayer Leverkusen (Ger)
11 caps (1 goal)

Self-assured, quick, creative and with an eye for goal. Also very versatile, able to play on the right or left side of midfield, up front or at full-back. Insisted on completing a business apprenticeship with a fabric and bed-linen manufacturer before leaving St Gallen for Leverkusen in 2004.

Ricardo Cabanas
MIDFIELDER 17.01.79
Köln (Ger)
34 caps (4 goals)

Neat, tidy and incisive attacking midfielder who has never let Switzerland down. But his failure to find his best form during postings at Breton side Guingamp and now Köln in the Bundesliga have raised doubts about his mental strength. The son of Spanish immigrants.

Johann Vogel
MIDFIELDER 08.03.77
Milan (Ita)
82 caps (2 goals)

The captain is a tireless grafter and does not give away possession cheaply. His problem is a lack of match practice; he has rarely featured for Milan since joining them from PSV last year. Teenage sensation at Euro 96. Prefers to lead by example rather than rabble-rouse.

Raphael Wicky
MIDFIELDER 26.04.77
Hamburg (Ger)
64 caps (1 goal)

Often inconspicuous defensive midfielder but an invaluable cog in the machine. Does sterling work on the left and in central areas, winning the ball and harassing opponents. Can also play in central defence and at full-back. Wants to be a ski instructor when he retires.

Hakan Yakin
MIDFIELDER 22.02.77
Young Boys
44 caps (14 goals)

On his day, the playmaker of Turkish extraction gives the attack another dimension with his killer through balls, cheeky invention, clever set-pieces and nose for goal. But he has floundered since leaving Basel in 2003 - too much diva-like behaviour, too many injuries, including his current back condition.

Reto Ziegler
MIDFIELDER 16.01.86
Wigan (Eng)
3 caps (0 goals)

All-action left-sided midfielder who makes things happen with his speedy and determined forward bursts. But sometimes lacks composure when delivering the final ball. On loan from Tottenham, he has been reduced to bit-parts this season with Hamburg and now Wigan.

Alexander Frei
FORWARD 15.07.79
Rennes (Fra)
42 caps (23 goals)

Not especially quick or strong, but is a natural predator in the box. His country's top marksman in the qualifiers with seven goals and sixth in the all-time list. Seems to have recovered well from a recent groin operation. Reported to be moving to Dortmund soon.

Also in contention

Centre-back **MURAT YAKIN** (15.09.74; Basel; 49 caps, 5 goals) offers great authority and experience but he has been plagued by injuries in recent years and has not played for Switzerland since September 2004. Battle-hardened stopper **STEPHANE HENCHOZ** (07.09.74; Wigan, Eng; 72 caps, 0 goals) is one of the main reasons behind his club's successful first season in the Premiership. **REMO MEYER** (12.11.80; 1860 Munich, Ger; 5 caps, 0 goals) has great competitive spirit and can play at right-back, in central defence or in a midfield holding role, though the fact he plays in the German second tier counts against him. **MARIO CANTALUPPI** (11.04.74; Nurnberg, Ger; 23 caps, 4 goals) is a granite-tough centre-back or sweeper in front of the defence who has been in good form at club level.

JOHANN LONFAT (11.09.73; Sochaux, Fra; 24 caps, 1 goal) is an unsung veteran defensive midfielder with a great engine and ball-winning ability. **BLERIM DZEMALI** (12.04.86; FC Zurich; 1 cap, 0 goals) is an up-and-coming young midfield workhorse of Macedonian extraction. Won his first cap against Scotland in March.

Daniel Gyax
FORWARD 28.08.81
Lille (Fra)
20 caps (4 goals)

Skilful player who can play on the right wing, push forward from central midfield or take a striking role. Has a good turn of pace, is inventive and knows where the goal is. Joined Lille from FC Zurich last summer.

Mauro Lustrinelli
FORWARD 26.02.76
Sparta Prague (Cze)
5 caps (0 goals)

One of the architects of Thun's transformation from domestic also-rans to Champions League participants. Hard-working, runs the channels intelligently and is normally a composed finisher, but not great in the air. Surprisingly left Thun for Sparta Prague in January.

Marco Streller
FORWARD 18.06.81
Köln (Ger)
8 caps (1 goal)

Towering, opportunistic front-man blessed with a delicate touch and great aerial power. But his career has been hampered by a dreadful run of injuries. Once wanted by Liverpool, he is currently on loan at Köln from Stuttgart. Worked as a bank clerk before joining Basel in 2001.

Johan Vonlanthen
FORWARD 01.02.86
NAC Breda (Hol)
17 caps (5 goals)

Pacy, fast-reacting striker whose goal against France at Euro 2004 made him the youngest scorer at a European Championship finals. Qualifies to play for the team through his Swiss stepfather because although he grew up in Switzerland he was born in Colombia. On loan at NAC from PSV.

TOGO

Disaster looms



MARK GLEESON

Shambolic preparations have brought comparisons with Zaire's nightmare campaign of 1974

TOGO'S QUALIFICATION for the finals was one of a number of surprises in Africa's preliminaries, but the turn of events since has been all too predictable. Although coach Stephen Keshi acquired hero status for steering the Togolese to their first World Cup, he was fired in January

after the team lost all three games at the African Nations Cup. The tournament, which had offered Togo the chance to prove their status as an emerging force in African football, turned into a nightmare and set off a series of events that mean the side will be under-prepared when they arrive in Germany.

Keshi's cause at the Egypt finals was not helped by a clash with temperamental star player Emmanuel Adebayor, whom the coach felt had failed to pull his weight in the preparations for the tournament. Keshi said as much and dropped the Arsenal striker for the opening game, on the grounds that Adebayor had missed much of the training camp while finalising his transfer from Monaco to Highbury.

But after informing Adebayor of his decision, Keshi then changed his mind and named the striker for the first game. The star's petulant reaction was to refuse to play, and he then gave a tirade of abuse against the coach that soured the rest of the tournament for the Togolese.

In the battle of wills, it was Adebayor, the scorer of 10 goals in the World Cup qualifiers, who emerged triumphant, but it is likely the team will be losers in the long run.

Late start

In Keshi's stead comes an old Africa hand in the form of German coach Otto Pfister. But he will not have had a chance to work with any of his new players before he is forced to name his squad by the May 15 deadline. He only gets them together for the first time for a friendly against Saudi Arabia in Holland on May 14.

Arguably, it is the most bizarre preparation any side have been through for a modern-era World Cup, and it leaves Togo with the potential to be nothing more than whipping boys for their group opponents, France, South Korea and Switzerland. Comparisons are being drawn with the last African side to play at a World Cup in Germany, Zaire, who conceded a deluge of goals against polished opposition in 1974.

Even without the Nations Cup disaster and Keshi's exit, the team would be struggling to put in a credible World Cup effort, given their limited playing resources. Togo have unashamedly "borrowed" players with even

tenuous links to the tiny west African country from neighbours Ghana and Nigeria to bolster the squad. Their lack of strength in depth was all too evident in Egypt as they suffered their whitewash.

Presumably now lost, too, are the attributes that got them to Germany in the first place – a solid group spirit and increasing self-belief, which had allowed them to top their qualifying group ahead of the more fancied Senegal and Zambia.



Up against it...Massamasso Tchangaï and team-mates face a mighty challenge in Germany

'Togo have unashamedly "borrowed" players with even tenuous links to the country'

'I have never wanted to coach back in Europe'

THE COACH: Otto Pfister



You were appointed just a few months before the finals. How do things look for Togo?

I am going to give everything to make sure that Togo do well. But it's a tough group. Just look at the FIFA rankings and you can see we are far behind the French, the Swiss and South Korea. But this is what it says on paper, not on the pitch.

So can you achieve something with the team?

I am a realist. Of course, I have a goal and that is not just to be a competitor at the finals. We are not going there for nothing. We want to win against South Korea [Togo's first opponents] and then we'll see what we can do.

You won the Under-17 World Championship with Ghana in

1991. Will that experience help this summer?

That has been one of my best experiences and it was a wonderful feeling to be called a world champion coach. That is how I became known in world football. It was my breakthrough as a coach. But my best achievement was to qualify Saudi Arabia for the 1998 World Cup. I had taken charge when they were struggling in their group behind Iran. But we caught them up and booked our place. But before the finals, Carlos Alberto Parreira became my successor. I wasn't prepared to allow the Saudi princes to dictate the players to be chosen for the World Cup squad. They forced me to make a stand, and within 24 hours Parreira was in Riyadh. Then, straight after the World

SCHEDULE

MAY 14 Togo v Saudi Arabia (Sittard, Holland)
MAY 15 Squad travel to World Cup base – the Hotel Waltersbühl in Wangen im Allgäu, near the Austrian border
JUNE 2 Togo v Liechtenstein (Vaduz)

WORLD CUP GROUP G

JUNE 13 Togo v South Korea (Frankfurt)
JUNE 19 Togo v Switzerland (Dortmund)
JUNE 23 Togo v France (Cologne)

Cup, I got my job back again. It was a ridiculous circus. Parreira stayed one floor above me in the same house. I had no problem with him, he cooked wonderful Brazilian meals for me. I had nothing against him because if he hadn't taken over, it would have been someone else.

How did your coaching career begin?

I finished my playing career at Chur in Switzerland at 35 and after that had a chance to coach at three Swiss clubs. But one day I was sitting in a hotel at breakfast and met a man from the diplomatic service who worked in cultural exchanges with Africa, and he said Algeria were looking for a national coach. Nothing came of it but the seeds of travel were sown

for me. I called him again eight months later, and he told me Rwanda needed a coach. I went there straight away. They had no professionals, no infrastructure, but what a wonderful country, crazy about football. I have never wanted to go back to Europe and coach. I love the freedom of what I do and I want to see something of the world.

How did you get the Togo job?

The federation president [Rock Gnassingbe] called me and asked: "Otto, are you available?" I flew to Togo, told them my ideas, waited for their decision, and after a while signed a contract and went back home [to Zurich]. I had another offer from the Middle East but I decided to go to the World Cup with Togo.

'Some people think we could get a real hiding'

THE PLAYER: Emmanuel Adebayor

How do you view the World Cup?

It's going to be extraordinary. I can't wait for it to start. We did not have a good African Cup of Nations and we are out to show people what we can do. I am very motivated by our first appearance in this competition as it's the greatest tournament in the world.

What can Togo achieve at the finals?

Nobody is expecting anything from us, and some



people think we could get a real hiding. But I just point to what we achieved in the qualifying campaign. We topped our group ahead of Senegal – and look what they did at the last World Cup. Anything is possible.

How easily have you adapted to English football with Arsenal?

I'm very happy with the way it has gone. Arsenal play football in a very continental way, so everything has gone really well. With all the French players and French-speaking

people at the club things have not been too difficult. Everyone has made a real effort to accommodate me. I see myself settling well here.

Was it frustrating to be sitting on the sidelines during Arsenal's Champions League campaign?

I knew before I came here that I would not play in this season's competition after appearing in the qualifying round with Monaco. It's not serious. I am just very happy for the team and the club that they have got to the Final.



TACTICS

OTTO PFISTER was an analyst for EuroSport's German service during the Nations Cup finals in Egypt, but he admits that few Togolese players stood out in the three group games. Since taking the job, the coach has said his selection will be based on players who are regulars for their clubs rather than names from previous qualifying campaigns. But if that policy is implemented, it would leave Togo woefully short of experience.

Kossi Agassa is the long-standing first-choice keeper but has seen little action at his club, Metz. Right-back Emmanuel Mathias is an exciting find, though Abdoul Gafar Mamah is putting in a strong challenge for the position. Zanzan Atte-Oudeyi and Ludovic Assemoassa compete for the left-back berth. Captain Jean-Paul Yaovi Abalo is a stalwart in central defence, but there is uncertainty about who will partner him. Eric Akoto has height in his favour, but has been without a club since February. That could open the door for Massamasso Tchangai, though he is far from a regular at his Italian Third Division side.

Yao Aziawonou is the leading contender for the midfield "enforcer" role, while Cherif Toure Mamam is a capable playmaker, but neither has seen much first-team action at their respective clubs. Alaixys Romao (right) and Junior Senaya (left) are likely to take the wide midfield positions.

Emmanuel Adebayor is the main striker; his partner will probably be Mohamed Kader Cougbadja.

Otto Pfister

COACH 24.11.37

The German is finally getting his chance to lead a team at the World Cup. He steered Saudi Arabia through the qualifiers for France 98, but was sacked before the finals. His other postings include Rwanda, Zaire (now DR Congo) and Bangladesh. Also led Ghana's Under-17s to the world title in 1991. Togo's game against France is in Pfister's home town, Cologne.

Kossi Agassa

GOALKEEPER

02.07.78
Metz (Fra)
48 caps (0 goals)



Long-standing first-choice for Togo and played in all but one of the 12 World Cup qualifiers but does not see regular action at Metz. Began his career at Etoile Filante in Lome, moved to Africa Sports in Ivory Coast and then France. Linked with a move to FC Brussels after the finals.

Ourou-Nimini Tchagnirou

GOALKEEPER

31.12.77
Djoliba (Mli)
8 caps (0 goals)



Tall, confident keeper who could displace Agassa as first-choice in Germany. Played in one of Togo's three games at the Nations Cup earlier this year. Moved to Malian club Djoliba last year from Togo's Semassi Sokode.

Jean-Paul Yaovi Abalo

DEFENDER

26.06.75
APOEL Nicosia (Cyp)
64 caps (1 goal)



Togo's most capped international, having spent 13 years in the side and competed at four Nations Cup finals. Brought up in France and played at Second Division Amiens for most of his career. Had a six-month stint at Dunkerque at the start of this season; joined APOEL in March.

Eric Akoto

DEFENDER

20.07.80
Unattached
31 caps (1 goal)



Ghana-born defender who was invited to play for Togo while on the books of Etoile Filante in Lome. Has since played for three Austrian clubs - Grazer AK, Austria Wien and Admira Wacker, the latter cancelling his contract in February. Speaks little French.

Ludovic Assemoassa

DEFENDER

18.09.80
Murcia (Spa)
5 caps (0 goals)



Born in France to a Togolese father and Cameroonian mother. Was a junior at Toulouse and played in the French Second Division for Clermont Foot. Moved to Spanish Second Division Murcia in February after appearing at the Nations Cup.

Zanzan Atte-Oudeyi

DEFENDER

02.09.80
Lokeren (Bel)
30 caps (1 goal)



The left-back's first Belgian club were Germinal Beerschot; he then moved to Lokeren, and is one of half a dozen African players at the club. One of Togo's more experienced players. Says he models his game on that of Roberto Carlos.

Abdoul Gafar Mamah

DEFENDER

24.08.85
Serif Tiraspol (Mol)
32 caps (0 goals)



Recently moved to eastern Europe after several seasons at Gabon side FC 105 Libreville. His stated date of birth is one of several anomalies in the Togolese squad - he made his international debut against Senegal in September 2000, when he was allegedly 15 years and one month.

Emmanuel Mathias

DEFENDER

03.04.86
Esperance (Tun)
9 caps (1 goal)



Nigeria-born right-back who played at BCC Lions in his native country before moving to Togo's Etoile Filante and getting the call to the Togolese national team. Signed last season for Esperance, with whom he has just won a championship medal.

Dare Nibombe

DEFENDER

16.06.80
Mons (Bel)
14 caps (0 goals)



Another squad member with roots in neighbouring Ghana, though his elder brother, Wake Nibombe, was a regular goalkeeper for Togo. Had a trial at Stoke in England last year but was not offered a contract and returned to Mons in the Belgian Second Division.

Massamasso Tchangai

DEFENDER

08.08.78
Benevento (Ita)
32 caps (2 goals)



Signed by Udinese after the 1998 Nations Cup and was then "parked" at Gorica in Slovenia and Dutch club De Graafschap before being offloaded to Viterbese and now Benevento in Italy's lower leagues. Made a return to the national team towards the end of last year.

Kuami Agboh

MIDFIELDER

28.12.77
Beveren (Bel)
3 caps (0 goals)



Former junior international with France who did not appear in the World Cup qualifiers or the Nations Cup but played in three friendlies in November and January. Started his career under the legendary Guy Roux at Auxerre; moved from there to Beveren midway through this season.

Yao Aziawonou

MIDFIELDER

30.11.79
Young Boys (Swi)
31 caps (1 goal)



Made his Togo debut in a Nations Cup qualifier in mid-1995, which calls into question his stated date of birth. The defensive midfielder started his career at Nantes in France before beginning an 11-season spell in the Swiss League. Reached the Swiss Cup Final with Young Boys this season.

Kassim Guyazou

MIDFIELDER

07.01.82
AS Douanes
13 caps (0 goals)



One of the few Togo-based players in the squad, he appeared twice at the recent Nations Cup and in three World Cup qualifiers. His pace helped AS Douanes win the League title last year.

Cherif Toure Mamam

MIDFIELDER

13.01.78
Metz (Fra)
38 caps (7 goals)



Caught age-cheating when on trial last year at Metz, with whom he signed. When he played at the 1998 Nations Cup, his year of birth was given as 1978, but documents lodged with the French League this season claim he was born in 1981. Has also played for Livingston in Scotland.

Alaixys Romao

MIDFIELDER

18.01.84
Louvain-Cuiseux (Fra)
9 caps (0 goals)



France-born midfielder who made his Togo debut in a friendly against Morocco last August and has since been a regular starter. The former Toulouse apprentice was once called up for France's Under-18 side but did not play in a competitive match and was able to switch allegiance.

Moustapha Salifou

MIDFIELDER

01.06.83
Brest (Fra)
32 caps (4 goals)



Joined French Second Division side Brest at the start of the season following a spell with Rot-Weiss Oberhausen in the German lower leagues. He has been a regular in the Togo squad for four years but was mainly only a substitute during the World Cup qualifiers.

Junior Senaya

MIDFIELDER

19.04.84
YF Juventus (Swi)
14 caps (2 goals)



His international fortunes have risen over the past two years as those of his elder brother, Yao Senaya, have declined. Both play in the Swiss Second Division. Senaya is the word for a distinctive peroxide-blond hairstyle.

Emmanuel Adebayor

FORWARD

26.02.83
Arsenal (Eng)
28 caps (12 goals)

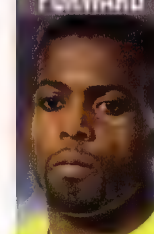


His tally of 10 goals in the qualifiers highlighted his pivotal role in the side, which was given even more emphasis by the removal of coach Stephen Keshi after his clash with Adebayor at the Nations Cup. Started with Metz at 15, moved to Monaco and then Arsenal just before the Egypt finals.

Mohamed Kader Cougbadja

FORWARD

08.04.74
Guingamp (Fra)
44 caps (12 goals)



Scorer of the goal that ensured qualification to the World Cup but has just one goal to his name in the past two seasons at club level. Recently joined Second Division Guingamp from top division Sochaux. His first European club were Parma and his other postings include Al Ahli in Libya.

Mickael Dodji Dogbe

FORWARD

28.11.76
Bani Yas (UAE)
10 caps (1 goal)



Paris-born striker who began his career at Grenoble and then joined Saint-Etienne. Moved to Rouen in 2004 but was released the following July, when he moved to the Gulf. Did not feature in World Cup qualification but has had a number of outings in friendlies over the past year.

Adekanmi Olufade

FORWARD

07.01.80
Al Siliya (Qat)
23 caps (1 goal)



Began his professional career in Ivory Coast with Satellite FC before moving to Lokeren in Belgium and then Lille in France. Has been playing in the Middle East for the past two seasons. Born in Togo to Nigerian parents.

Djima Oyawole

FORWARD

18.10.76
Shenzhen Jianlibao (Chn)
29 caps (6 goals)



Has plenty of international experience and is a former league top scorer in China.

Robert Soulieman

FORWARD

13.07.83
Kermt-Hasselt (Bel)
4 caps (1 goal)



Young forward now in the lower leagues in Belgium having failed to pass muster in trials at Anderlecht.

Also in contention

Keeper **SAFIU SALIFOU** (11.08.82; Dyto Lome; 4 caps, 0 goals) is in line to take the third keeper slot. He has been a squad member since his debut in 2001, but has made few appearances.

Defender **MOUSTAPHA ALIMALOUWA** (07.08.83; Maranatha; 0 caps) is a long shot for a finals place but did make the squad for the last set of World Cup qualifiers last year. Another defender, **RICHMOND FORSON** (23.05.80; Jeanne d'Arc Poiré, Fra; 6 caps, 0 goals), was brought back into the squad in November for a tournament in Tehran, where Togo lost to Paraguay and Iran.

Former Togo captain **LANTAME OUDJIA** (28.08.77; Unattached; 47 caps, 5 goals) would provide cover in midfield but his lack of a club hampers his chances of a call-up. France-born **JONATHAN TOKPLE** (29.07.86; Paris Saint-Germain, Fra; 2 caps, 0 goals) is still in the reserves at PSG but has a bright future.

LORIE BADAWASSI (07.11.80; Bourg-Peronnas, Fra; 2 caps, 0 goals) is a journeyman forward who has played in Portugal, Italy, Holland, Belgium and now France.

TRINIDAD & TOBAGO



LASANA LIBURD IN
PORT-OF-SPAIN



Showing the world...striker Stern John will be a key figure for T&T in Germany

'In truth, the Soca Warriors will be fortunate to get more than an honourable mention in Germany'

Cummings and, from the present squad, Dwight Yorke, Stern John and Carlos Edwards, have the technique, strength and poise to succeed in any part of the globe. It is fitting that the tiny twin-island republic, a former British colony that lies just off the South American mainland, should be able to produce players that combine what are traditionally regarded as European and Latin qualities.

But the team as a whole have often suffered because of poor concentration, a slow transition from attack to defence, and a tendency to lose shape under pressure.

National coach Leo Beenhakker has greatly improved matters by adjusting the tactics, but it is his psychological input that has made the biggest impression on the team. The experienced Dutchman, who replaced local coach Bertille St Clair in April 2005, immediately laid down the gauntlet by omitting talented players who, he felt, lacked the drive to decide matches. As a result, his squad grew steadily in character, if not class.

Appreciable balance

The present Soca Warriors are not as attractive to watch as the 1989 Strike Squad, or as potent offensively as the 1973 Classic Team, but their blend of experience and determination is unparalleled, and there is an appreciable balance within the ranks.

Those qualities were sufficient to allow T&T to overcome a poor start to the final qualifying round – one point from three matches – and book their first World Cup finals berth by winning a play-off against Bahrain.

Now, the fans want a second round spot in Germany, while FIFA vice-president and T&T federation special adviser Jack Warner has demanded the scalp of the formidable England team in the group stage.

Warner, a controversial figure, was censured by FIFA earlier this year for diverting the nation's World Cup tickets to his private company. But his oft-repeated statements about England's supposed shortcomings have definitely boosted the confidence of T&T's supporters.

In truth, though, the Soca Warriors would be fortunate to get more than an honourable mention in Germany. Caribbean rivals Jamaica won their final group fixture at the 1998 World Cup, but then the Reggae Boyz had the good fortune to be drawn with two fellow debutants, Croatia and Japan.

T&T, on the other hand, tackle three nations (England, Sweden and Paraguay) vastly more experienced in such top international competitions and who rarely exit before the round of 16.

which convinced colleagues that his background was South American. On another day, though, Cummings would exhibit the physical strength, appetite for the tackle and eye for an early long ball that, they felt, suggested European schooling.

The all-round ability of Trinidad & Tobago's top players is their most impressive asset. The likes of

All about attitude

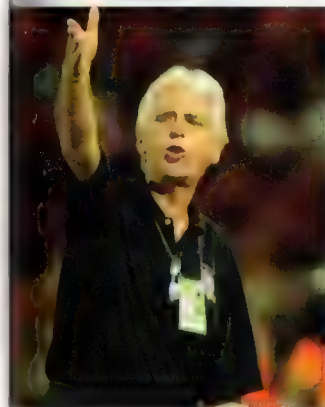
Dutch coach Beenhakker has instilled a mental toughness in the Caribbean debutants

VERALD "GALLY" CUMMINGS, a former Trinidad & Tobago star player, was viewed as a pleasing oddity among his team-mates when he plied his trade in the cosmopolitan North American Soccer League in the 1970s.

The creative midfielder had quick feet, a sure touch and the ability to dance around defenders,

'We used to have 20 good individuals but no team'

THE COACH: Leo Beenhakker



It's been said that some of your key players are too old for a World Cup.

The people who say that don't have the insight I do. I suppose they mean players such as Dwight Yorke, but for me Yorke is still a great player

who can move the team along and create opportunities. He can also pass on his experience. It's true I had hoped he would be able to find a new club so he could be playing regularly in the run-up to the World Cup, but this wasn't possible. Still, he has been training at Manchester United, so that's the best possible alternative.

Have your ideas changed much since you clinched qualification by beating Bahrain in the play-offs?

When I became coach during the qualifiers it was a question of making the best of what we had. But in the weeks before the finals we need to change the style of our football. That's why I have been looking to the last four

weeks in the run-up to the tournament.

What are you planning?

After I started the job in May last year we had nine games, and every time we had the players only for three or four days before a match. We had 20 good individuals but no team. Also, there were a lot of players from British football in the team who tended to want to hit the ball long and go for the second ball. But we needed to change that, particularly in terms of controlling the midfield, because that previous style was not appropriate for a World Cup and the sort of opponents we will face.

How is morale?

We could see, with every game, how the team came

SCHEDULE

MAY 27 Trinidad & Tobago v Wales (Graz, Austria)
MAY 31 Trinidad & Tobago v Slovenia (Celje)
JUNE 3 Trinidad & Tobago v Czech Republic (Prague)
Squad then travel to World Cup base – the Landhaus Wachtelhof hotel in Rotenburg, near Bremen

WORLD CUP GROUP B

JUNE 10 Trinidad & Tobago v Sweden (Dortmund)
JUNE 15 Trinidad & Tobago v England (Nuremberg)
JUNE 20 Trinidad & Tobago v Paraguay (Kaiserslautern)

more together as a unit and in spirit. Of course, getting good results helped. When we have the players together for a month the spirit will develop even more.

Was it a conscious decision to stick largely with the players who got you through to the finals?

We did look at other players, mainly in British football, but not for too long. The guys who got us to the finals had earned respect and their chance to play there, and we did not want to disturb team spirit.

Will the players not be overawed at appearing at the World Cup, which, for most,

is probably beyond their wildest dreams?

I don't think so. We have been building gradually towards this and working hard on what is needed tactically and psychologically. Many of them have played at good levels in Europe. They have the necessary experience. I've got a lot of faith in this team.

How does the job compare with previous tenures with Holland, Real Madrid and Ajax?

The pitch is the same, the goals are the same, the ball is the same and the task is the same: to keep the ball, to be organised in defence, and to score goals. Football is a simple game, isn't it?

Interview by Keir Radnedge

'It's a huge opportunity to show what I can do'

THE PLAYER: Aurtis Whitley

What do you expect from the World Cup?

I'm expecting it to be hectic and difficult because we are a small country playing in the World Cup for the first time. But we should have plenty of support.

What do you know about T&T's group opponents?

England and Sweden have really good teams with plenty of great players, so they will be very tough. But I think Paraguay will be our hardest game because the South Americans have a similar style to Mexico, who are the most difficult team I have faced.

What does playing in the World Cup mean for your career?

It could be the break I have been waiting for. I have a good career [in Trinidad] but going abroad will be better, so it will be a huge opportunity to show what I can do.

What are the strengths of the coach and the squad?

Beenhakker's strength is his communication with the players. He is very professional and, by the way he talks to us, you can tell he gives us respect, so we try to give him respect back. The togetherness and the love the players have for each other is

the reason we have done so well. Anybody can talk to anybody and discuss any problems without difficulty.

How did your recent trial at Portsmouth go?

It was two weeks and [manager] Harry Redknapp told my agent that he was impressed. But I want to wait until after the World Cup before I decide on my future.

Before the Mexico qualifier, you were the only regular T&T-based player in the starting line-up but often the first to be subbed. Did that affect your confidence or frustrate you?

It was making me doubt myself. I was wondering what I was doing wrong to be the first change all the time. But I worked even harder and things got better.

Do you feel a special responsibility to do well?

Yes. The majority of the scouts will be looking at the overseas-based players, so I want to show there is plenty of talent at home, too. I played for a while in Portugal before joining Jablotek, 10 years ago, but the chance to move back to Europe just did not come. Some players are more fortunate than others.

Interview by Lasana Liburd



TRINIDAD & TOBAGO



TACTICS

TRINIDAD & TOBAGO are expected to line up in a 4-4-1-1 formation in Germany. Coach Leo Beenhakker's favoured starting team has Kelvin Jack in goal, with Cyd Gray, Marvin Andrews, Dennis Lawrence and Avery John as his back four. Carlos Edwards, Chris Birchall, Aurtis Whitley and Collin Samuel should make up the midfield, with captain Dwight Yorke floating behind main striker Stern John.

Yorke is key to the team, the player who ensures balance. He is expected to drop deep if necessary to help develop play, or make runs into the box.

Birchall will sit in midfield to protect the back line, while the other three midfielders must help create for John up front with their pace and dribbling skills.

The full-backs must not stray too far from the defensive line, since their pace is important alongside the somewhat ponderous centre-backs. But Andrews and Lawrence do offer a goal threat at set-pieces.

Veteran Russell Latapy can pose problems for defenders with his dribbling skills and clever passing. He is likely to be a direct replacement for Yorke, but the two could be played together in a potent combination if the Soca Warriors are chasing the game.

T&T are a tight, collective unit but rarely counter-attack and will need time in possession to make an impact in Germany.

Leo Beenhakker

COACH 08.02.42



The former Real Madrid and Ajax boss took charge last April and quickly sought out players with a winning mentality while also focusing on the team's collective play, and the combination has worked well. Failed to win a game at Italia 90 in charge of his native Holland. His biting wit and scowls give him the air of a fierce schoolmaster.

Shaka Hislop

GOALKEEPER 22.02.69
West Ham (Eng)
23 caps (0 goals)



The 37-year-old, the Caribbean's most successful keeper, has enjoyed a revival with West Ham this season and will press hard for the No 1 jersey in Germany. He won England's PFA Merit Award last year for his anti-racism work and long footballing service.

Clayton Ince

GOALKEEPER 13.07.72
Coventry (Eng)
63 caps (0 goals)



A good athlete and capable of fantastic saves. The 1997 T&T Player of the Year is still very popular with local fans despite slipping to No 3 in the pecking order. Holds Crewe Alexandra's record for clean sheets in a single season.

Kelvin Jack

GOALKEEPER 29.04.76
Dundee (Sco)
29 caps (0 goals)



A surprise starter for the qualifiers, but Jack repaid Beenhakker's faith, showing strong character and giving athletic performances. His superb save late on against Bahrain in the play-off second leg was critical for qualification. Leaving Dundee on a free transfer this summer.

Marvin Andrews

DEFENDER 22.12.75
Rangers (Sco)
98 caps (10 goals)



Uncompromising tackler and superb in the air, making him deadly at set-pieces, but not great in possession. Became an idol at Rangers after ignoring cruciate ligament damage to lead the club to the 2004-05 League title. A born-again Christian and former cleaner at Trinidad's leading brewery.

Ian Cox

DEFENDER 25.03.71
Gillingham (Eng)
15 caps (0 goals)



Composed, steady central defender and one of two England-bred players (along with Chris Birchall) in the World Cup set-up. Has formed a solid partnership with Sancho at Gillingham in England's third tier but has not won a regular place in the national team.

Cyd Gray

DEFENDER 21.11.73
San Juan Jabloteh
35 caps (1 goal)



Rugged right-back and a tremendous athlete who will not be found wanting for pace or commitment, although he could improve technically. Became the first Tobagan player since Dwight Yorke to establish himself in the senior national team.

Avery John

DEFENDER 18.06.75
New England (USA)
48 caps (0 goals)



Combative left-back who impressed in T&T's 2-0 friendly win against Iceland in February. Uninspiring going forward, however. The left-footer played for two Republic of Ireland clubs, Bohemians and Longford Town. Now in the US.

Dennis Lawrence

DEFENDER 01.08.74
Wrexham (Wal)
58 caps (3 goals)



The 6ft 7in, gangly defender was the hero of the play-off against Bahrain, scoring the only goal of the second leg to secure qualification. Has nimble feet for such a big man. At his best alongside the muscular Andrews. Won the LDV Vans Trophy with Wrexham last year.

Brent Sancho

DEFENDER 13.03.77
Gillingham (Eng)
38 caps (0 goals)



Can play in central defence or at full-back and is mobile and strong in the tackle, but his aerial and positional play could improve. Missed much of the qualifying campaign because of injury. Has played for clubs in Finland, the United States, Scotland and England.

Chris Birchall

MIDFIELDER 05.05.84
Port Vale (Eng)
15 caps (2 goals)



The hard-working Liverpool-born midfielder is T&T's first white player for over three decades; he qualifies because his mother was born in Port-of-Spain. Hit a superb equaliser, a 30-yard volley, in the play-off first leg against Bahrain. Part of the squad since last May.

Carlos Edwards

MIDFIELDER 24.10.78
Luton (Eng)
47 caps (1 goal)



Has good balance and a deceptive turn of pace, and his ability to get past defenders will be crucial to T&T's chances in Germany. At home on either flank as a winger or wing-back. Was at Wrexham with Lawrence when they won the LDV Vans Trophy last year. Now at Luton.

Russell Latapy

MIDFIELDER 02.08.68
Falkirk (Sco)
64 caps (28 goals)



The Little Magician is second only to Yorke as the Caribbean's most popular footballer. Has lost acceleration but, like Yorke, still has plenty of vision and technique. Played for FC Porto and has had spells with three Scottish clubs - Hibernian, Rangers and now Falkirk.

Anthony Rougier

MIDFIELDER 17.07.71
United Petrotrin
57 caps (3 goals)



The strong, skilful journeyman made a late run for the squad, no doubt helped by his versatility. Rougier has played in every position except keeper for T&T. Has been with Scottish, English and Chinese clubs; when at Reading, he was compared to Eric Cantona by boss Alan Pardew, now at West Ham.

Collin Samuel

MIDFIELDER 27.08.81
Dundee United (Sco)
15 caps (3 goals)



Bagged a hat-trick on his international debut in 2001 but has not scored since. Impressed when played on the left wing in the friendly win against Iceland in February. His pace and agility should help create space for T&T's strikers. A quiet but determined figure.

Silvio Spann

MIDFIELDER 21.08.81
Unattached
26 caps (1 goal)



Has sound technique and a cracking shot from open play or set-pieces. Prefers a central midfield role, but can also be used at right-back. Previously on the books of Perugia in Italy and has also played in Japan. The son of former national team playmaker Leroy "Spanner" Spann.

Densill Theobald

MIDFIELDER 27.06.82
Falkirk (Sco)
33 caps (1 goal)



A lively central midfielder who can also be used on the left flank. Comfortable with either foot and a good worker, although he still tends to shirk his defensive responsibilities. An affable, outgoing person and popular with his team-mates. Born and raised in Port-of-Spain's gritty inner city.

Aurtis Whitley

MIDFIELDER 01.05.77
San Juan Jabloteh
21 caps (1 goal)



Arguably the squad's most consistent and dynamic player. T&T's answer to Steven Gerrard can tackle, dribble, shoot and run. His name was originally Aurtis Otis Seaton but he added Whitley, his father's surname, in the hope of convincing US immigration to let him join his dad in the States.

Anthony Wolfe

MIDFIELDER 31.12.81
San Juan Jabloteh
3 caps (0 goals)



Surprise squad inclusion, but the left-footer offers aggression, pace and skill. Still an obscure figure, even in T&T football, but showed ambition by ditching home club North East Stars after a call from ex-England defender Terry Fenwick, who coaches Jabloteh, a more celebrated local side.

Dwight Yorke

MIDFIELDER 03.11.71
Sydney FC (Aus)
50 caps (15 goals)



The Caribbean's most celebrated player after winning the 1999 UEFA Champions League with Manchester United. Returned to international duty from self-imposed exile in February last year and now plays in midfield, as opposed to up front. Has superb technique and finishing ability.

Also in contention

ANTHONY WARNER (11.05.74; Fulham, Eng; 1 cap, 0 goals), a capable shot-blocker, has only just joined the national team set-up; Beenhakker may opt to stick with his regular keepers.

Versatile defender **ATIBA CHARLES** (29.08.77; W Connection; 16 caps, 0 goals) is mobile and strong but has struggled to reclaim his squad place after a blunder in the 1-0 qualifying loss away to the United States. **ANTON PIERRE** (23.09.77; Defence Force; 53 caps, 1 goal) is also versatile, capable of playing in central defence or at right-back but is short on pace. **NIGEL HENRY** (24.05.76; Kiruna FF, Swe; 2 caps, 0 goals) can play as a central defender or at left-back.

BRENT RAHIM (08.08.78; San Juan Jabloteh; 49 caps, 3 goals) has not filled his promise as the heir to Latapy. Nevertheless, he's still a useful tackler and passer in central midfield.

SCOTT SEALY (04.06.81; Kansas City Wizards, USA; 16 caps, 2 goals) is a strong, bustling centre-forward who scores frequently at club level but has been in and out of the national team. The quick but unpolished **RICKY SHAKES** (25.01.85; Swindon, Eng; 1 cap, 0 goals) failed to make an impact in his debut as a substitute forward against Iceland in February. **HECTOR SAM** (25.02.78; Port Vale, Eng; 21 caps, 2 goals) broke a leg last year and missed much of the qualifying series. Still a skilful striker, though.

Cornell Glen

FORWARD 21.10.81
Los Angeles Galaxy (USA)
33 caps (11 goals)



Once tipped to be T&T's next big star but rarely used by Beenhakker. The left-footed attacker has bundles of pace and skill but his maverick approach means he is not always effective. Had a spell in Portugal and under ex-Luton star Ricky Hill at Jabloteh before moving to the US.

Stern John

FORWARD 30.10.76
Coventry (Eng)
91 caps (64 goals)



T&T's all-time leading scorer. An emotional character known to be critical of team-mates and fans on occasion but his knack for getting crucial goals makes him indispensable. His hold-up play should be important in Germany. Lacks pace.

Kenwyne Jones

FORWARD 05.10.84
Southampton (Eng)
24 caps (1 goal)



Mobile, aerially strong forward who was pushed up front from midfield on Yorke's recommendation but has yet to justify the switch in terms of goals. When he does score, he celebrates with a somersault. Played as a defender at the 2001 Under-17 World Championship.

Jason Scotland

FORWARD 18.02.79
St Johnstone (Sco)
22 caps (5 goals)



Skilful player with a powerful shot off either foot but more effective outside the box than in it. Controversially denied a work permit to play for Scottish top-flight side Dundee United last summer, but qualified to appear for second tier St Johnstone and has led the division's scoring table.

TUNISIA

Little and large

The small north African country has the big ambition to reach the knockout stages for the first time



MARK GLEESON

IN GEOGRAPHIC TERMS, Tunisia is a minnow of Africa; in footballing terms, the national team will be the continent's giants at the World Cup.

Of the five African teams in Germany, only Tunisia have any experience of the finals. The fact that this is their third successive appearance underlines their status as one of Africa's best-organised and most professional sides, even if their playing resources are a little thin.

Tunisia have already made World Cup history: their win against Mexico in 1978 in Argentina was the first by an African country at a finals. This summer, they are appearing for a fourth time and have a vastly experienced side. Players such as Radhi Jaïdi, Riadh Bouazizi, Kaies Ghodhbane, Jose Clayton, Hatem Trabelsi and 40-year-old keeper Ali Boumnijel are all veterans of the competition.

Bouazizi and Ghodhbane have also played in six successive African Nations Cup tournaments and were thus at the start of the evolutionary process for the current national squad.

In 1996, Tunisia picked a young side for the Nations Cup, viewing it primarily as preparation for the Olympic Games later that year. So they were pleasantly surprised to gain a place in the Final, which they lost 2-0 to hosts South Africa. And while the Under-23 team bombed in Atlanta, the seeds of confidence had been planted.

Tunisia qualified for the last two World Cups, where they exited at the group stage both times. But their potential to go a stage further this time has been boosted by the hiring of former France coach Roger Lemerre.

Looking abroad

The team have also benefited from the policy of looking beyond Tunisia-born players in order to boost the quality and depth of the squad. The current key player is Brazil-born striker Francileudo dos Santos, whose finishing ensured qualification for Germany. Santos was offered Tunisian nationality on the eve of the 2004 Nations Cup, and his goals at the finals, played on home soil, were a major part of Tunisia's run to their first African crown.

Lemerre's latest acquisition is Toulouse-born defender David Jemali, who resisted overtures from Tunisia for a decade before finally agreeing in March to play for the country of his father's birth.

Tunisia were a polished side in the preliminaries, seeing off strong north African rivals Morocco. Now the ambition is to get through to the knockout stages at a World Cup for the first time.



Driving for goal...Hamed Namouchi (left) and his team-mates want a place in the last 16 in Germany

'The potential to go further has been boosted by the hiring of former France coach Roger Lemerre'

'No one will find us easy meat'

THE COACH: Roger Lemerre

Your opening game, against Saudi Arabia in Munich, looks all-important.

Without any doubt. This is a game we must look to win. If we take the three points, and Spain and Ukraine draw, which is quite possible, we could be on top of the group after the first set of matches. To be in such a position would be a huge psychological boost and give us the confidence to face Spain and Ukraine in the best possible frame of mind.

How do you rate Spain and Ukraine?

As two powerful football nations, who ally creativity with defensive rigour. Both have exceptional individuals, and I won't pretend to be unconcerned by what a Raul or a Shevchenko could do to us. Spain have a reputation for

not doing as well as they should in tournaments but yesterday's truth is not necessarily today's.

Can Tunisia qualify for the knockout stages for the first time?

That is our objective. It goes without saying that Spain and Ukraine are the favourites to go through, but if football has taught me anything it's that surprises can never be discounted. We have a great deal of prestige to defend in Germany and no one will find us easy meat. We'll be positive and focused.

This will be Tunisia's third successive World Cup, and yet they do not enjoy the same high profile in Africa as Cameroon, Ivory Coast and Nigeria. Why?

It's probably because we don't have the big names such as Drogba or Eto'o. We have good players but they are not as famous. I don't feel Tunisia is in any way inferior to other teams in Africa.

What are the strong points of your side?

I have to pay tribute to the character and togetherness the players have shown since I took over. Their commitment has been total. We've also developed the sort of tactical discipline a European team would be proud of.

You lost on penalties to Nigeria in this year's Nations Cup quarter-finals. What lessons did you draw from the tournament?

Overall, I was pleased with our attacking play. We have

SCHEDULE

MAY 17-27 Training camp in Switzerland
MAY 30-JUNE 2 Four-team tournament (Tunisia)
JUNE 3 Squad travel to World Cup base – the Mercure hotel in Schweinfurt, 100km north-west of Nuremberg
JUNE 7 Tunisia v Kuwait (Schweinfurt)

WORLD CUP GROUP H

JUNE 14 Tunisia v Saudi Arabia (Munich)
JUNE 19 Tunisia v Spain (Stuttgart)
JUNE 23 Tunisia v Ukraine (Berlin)

improved a lot in this area. But defensively we had our weaknesses. I hear people say we should mark man-for-man rather than zonally but that's a double-edged sword. As far as I'm aware, Auxerre in France are one of the few teams who have had any success lately with individual marking.

Can an African nation ever win a World Cup?

I don't see why not. I think the whole world expects it to happen at some point. European football is full of talented Africans. Personally, I've had a lot of pleasure watching African sides at the World Cup, whether it be



Cameroon in Italy or Nigeria at USA 94. Hopefully, this will be Tunisia's turn.

Interview by Nick Bidwell

'We all play for the same flag'

THE PLAYER: Adel Chedli



You scored the goal that ensured qualification (the equaliser in the 2-2 draw with Morocco in Rades). Will you ever score a more important one?

Not unless I get one in Germany. Yes, it was a vital goal and I'm very proud to have made every football fan in the country happy. I've often been told I don't score enough, so that was the perfect answer. That final tie against Morocco was a very tense affair and twice we went a goal behind. But we showed our character by fighting back each time. That's one of our strengths. We don't easily admit defeat.

You were born in France like several of your team-mates. Is there ever any conflict

between you and those who hail from Tunisia?

Not in the slightest. We all have the same objectives, play for the same flag, come from the same culture. We all get on splendidly. If there was disharmony you would quickly notice it in the performances.

Tunisia have not got beyond the group stage in three attempts. Why should this time be any different?

Apart from our great desire to do well, I'd point to the experience accumulated by many of our players in Europe. Trabelsi has been with Ajax for years, Jaïdi has impressed in England with Bolton, Santos has scored goals for a long time in France, Namouchi has done

well for Rangers, so has Hagui at Strasbourg. Before the 2004 African Nations Cup we had a handful earning a living abroad. Now there's 20 or more. That says a lot about the status of Tunisian players. We have become respected.

Who do you fear most of your group opponents?

I respect them all. Spain and Ukraine have the big names and theoretically are the strongest. But we will have no pressure on us and we are quite capable of a surprise. The difficult game is with the Saudis. It's our first, and we have to win to set us up in the best possible way.

Roger Lemerre said at the time that you lost "with

elegance" against Argentina, 2-1, and Germany, 3-0, at last year's Confederations Cup. Do you agree?

We had good periods in both matches. Against the Argentinians, we came back strongly after going 2-0 down; and we kept Germany out until the last 15 minutes. We also beat Australia 2-0. We are not too far away from the top sides in the world. We lack just a few little things.

Who will be your stars at the World Cup?

As our coach says, the team is the star. But if I had to single out anybody it would be Jaïdi and Hagui at the back, and Santos, who is just a born finisher.

Interview by Nick Bidwell



TUNISIA



TACTICS

TUNISIA ARE a hardy unit, well-drilled by Roger Lemerre, though there is always the feeling that something special is missing, the touch of inspiration that can turn tight matches in the team's favour.

Forty-year-old Ali Boumnijel is the first-choice keeper, but erratic at best. Right-back Hatem Trabelsi is a strong attacking threat down the flank, while Jose Clayton also offers pace and thrust on the left. Karim Hagui and Radhi Jaidi are Lemerre's favourite central defensive pairing, though newcomer David Jemmali is likely to make a strong bid for a place.

In midfield, captain Riadh Bouazizi plays a defensive role in tandem with Kaies Ghodhbane; if Lemerre wants a more attacking set-up, Sofiane Melliti can slot in as a playmaker role. The midfield's attacking impetus comes from Adel Chedli's terrier-like workrate, Chaouki Ben Saada's running or the deft touches of Slim Benachour. Tunisia have rarely used the same four players in midfield in successive games.

Francileudo dos Santos is the automatic first-choice striker, and his pace allows Tunisia to play an effective counter-attacking game. Santos' partner is usually Ziad Jaziri.

Ali Boumnijel

GOALKEEPER

13.04.66
Club Africain
47 caps (0 goals)



The World Cup will be the 40-year-old's swansong after a topsy-turvy international career. Had been out in the cold when he got the call for France 98 following Chokri El-Ouaer's sudden retirement. Also played at the Korea/Japan finals.

Khaled Fadhel

GOALKEEPER

29.09.76
Erciyesspor (Tur)
7 caps (0 goals)



Battling with Kasraoui for the No 2 berth, and both were given a start at last year's Confederations Cup. Fadhel, formerly with Club Africain, was the keeper at the 2004 Olympics.

Hamdi Kasraoui

GOALKEEPER

18.01.83
Esperance
5 caps (0 goals)



Former Under-23s keeper who is a contender for a senior squad berth even though he is not first-choice at his club. Started the final group game at this year's Nations Cup and played for Esperance in last year's African Champions League.

Anis Ayari

DEFENDER

16.02.82
Samsunspor (Tur)
23 caps (1 goal)



Utility player who provides back-up in midfield as well as defence. A member of Tunisia's Nations Cup-winning squad in 2004 and was in the Olympic set-up later that year.

Jose Clayton

DEFENDER

21.03.74
Al Sadd (Qat)
38 caps (2 goals)



Brazil-born overlapping left-back who is heading for his third successive World Cup. First played at Etoile Sahel, joined Bastia in France, returned to Tunisia with Esperance and now in Qatar. The national team's free-kick specialist.

Karim Hagui

DEFENDER

20.01.84
Strasbourg (Fra)
26 caps (4 goals)



Started his career at Etoile Sahel, moving to Strasbourg in 2004 after playing in all six games of Tunisia's Nations Cup triumph. Plagued by niggling injuries during the past season.

Radhi Jaidi

DEFENDER

30.08.75
Bolton (Eng)
87 caps (5 goals)



Aerially-powerful defender who has had two seasons in the English Premiership. Spent more than a decade at Esperance, with whom he won almost every honour in African club football.

David Jemmali

DEFENDER

13.12.74
Bordeaux (Fra)
1 cap (0 goals)



Toulouse-born player who once had ambitions to appear for France and regularly turned down approaches to play for Tunisia, his father's native country. Jemmali eventually relented at the age of 31, making his debut for the north Africans in March against Serbia & Montenegro.

Karim Saidi

DEFENDER

24.03.83
Lecce (Ita)
14 caps (0 goals)



Moved to Lecce mid-season after a poor run of form at Feyenoord, where he had initially made a strong impression. Previously played at Club Africain in Tunis and is a former Under-23 international.

Hatem Trabelsi

DEFENDER

25.01.77
Ajax (Hol)
55 caps (0 goals)



One of the world's best right-backs and is being strongly courted by several major clubs as his contract with Ajax comes to an end. Already has two World Cups under his belt and won the Nations Cup in 2004. Started his career at CS Sfaxien.

Alaeddine Yahia

DEFENDER

26.09.81
Saint-Etienne (Fra)
12 caps (0 goals)



Born in France and played briefly in England with Southampton. Yahia was a squad member at the 2004 Nations Cup but Saint-Etienne refused to release him for this year's African finals.

Chaouki Ben Saada

MIDFIELDER

01.07.84
Bastia (Fra)
11 caps (0 goals)



Another player who was born in France, and he won the 2001 Under-17 World Championship with that country. Switched allegiance to Tunisia, his parents' native country, in early 2005. Suffered relegation with Bastia last season.

Slim Benachour

MIDFIELDER

08.09.81
Vitoria Guimaraes (Por)
41 caps (2 goals)



Born in Paris but has been a Tunisian international since his teenage years. But the playmaker's first-team place is now under threat because of a dip in form. Moved to Guimaraes from Paris Saint-Germain to try to get his career back on track.

Riadh Bouazizi

MIDFIELDER

08.04.73
Erciyesspor (Tur)
83 caps (4 goals)

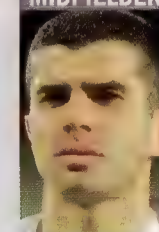


The captain's penalty miss in the Nations Cup quarter-final shoot-out against Nigeria in February meant Tunisia failed to successfully defend their crown. Bouazizi has played at six Nations Cups and two World Cups.

Adel Chedli

MIDFIELDER

16.09.76
Nurnberg (Ger)
36 caps (4 goals)



Tough-tackling, hard-working midfielder whose combative nature is key to Tunisia's gameplan. Born in France and played for the country at junior level. Has had an unhappy time in his first season in the Bundesliga, where he moved from Sochaux.

Kaies Ghodhbane

MIDFIELDER

07.01.76
Konyaspor (Tur)
88 caps (6 goals)



Won the African Cup-winners Cup and CAF Cup with Etoile Sahel. Moved to the United Arab Emirates and then Turkey. Played in the last two World Cups and at six Nations Cup finals.

Sofiane Melliti

MIDFIELDER

18.08.78
Gaziantepspor (Tur)
13 caps (1 goal)



Impressed at this year's Nations Cup having received a surprise call-up from Lemerre. Moved to Turkey from Ukraine in February; formerly with Etoile Sahel.

Jouhar Mnari

MIDFIELDER

08.11.76
Nurnberg (Ger)
35 caps (1 goal)



Twice won the League with Esperance and joined unheralded Bundesliga side Nurnberg last summer. Played in all six matches in 2004 when Tunisia won the Nations Cup, but his star has faded since his move to Germany.

Hamed Namouchi

MIDFIELDER

14.02.84
Rangers (Sco)
13 caps (0 goals)



Born in France and first played at Cannes. Had trials at Chelsea as a teenager before a surprise move to Scotland. Debuted for Tunisia last year and has given strong performances in recent matches.

Also in contention

Right-back **AMIR HAJ MASSAOU** (08.02.81; CS Sfaxien; 5 caps, 0 goals) could be used as cover for Trabelsi.

IMED MHADHEBI (22.03.76; Nantes, Fra; 55 caps, 12 goals) is an experienced winger who can also fill a central attacking role.

Forward **KARIM ESSEDIRI** (29.07.79; Rosenberg, Nor; 5 caps, 0 goals) made a rare national team appearance in the friendly against Serbia & Montenegro in March. **AMINE LTIFI** (04.07.84; Esperance; 2 caps, 1 goal) could get the nod after finishing top League scorer as his club won the Tunisian championship. **ALI ZITOUNI** (11.01.81; Troyes, Fra; 38 caps, 13 goals) offers good experience, having played at the last World Cup, but has recently lost his place because of injuries.

Roger Lemerre

COACH

18.06.41



Not the type to admit it, but the trip to Germany offers a chance of redemption after his France side failed so dismally in Korea in 2002. Either side of that, he won Euro 2000 with Les Bleus and the 2004 Nations Cup with Tunisia. Was assistant to Aime Jacquet during France's home World Cup triumph in 1998. Has also coached top Tunisian club Esperance.

Haikel Gmamdia

FORWARD

22.12.81
Strasbourg (Fra)
12 caps (5 goals)



Sideline by injury for several months and struggling to be fit in time for the finals. Scored several vital goals in the World Cup qualifiers. Helped CS Sfaxien win the Tunisian League last year; now at Strasbourg.

Ziad Jaziri

FORWARD

12.07.78
Troyes (Fra)
59 caps (13 goals)



Plagued by injuries this season but still favourite to partner Santos in Germany. A hero in Tunisia since he scored the winner against Morocco in the 2004 Nations Cup Final. Previously played at Etoile Sahel.

Issam Jomaa

FORWARD

28.01.84
Lens (Fra)
10 caps (1 goal)



Left-footed striker who was quick to make an impression at Esperance last season and was snapped up by Lens in August. Made his Tunisia debut in a World Cup qualifier against Botswana last June.

Francileudo dos Santos

FORWARD

20.03.79
Toulouse (Fra)
27 caps (17 goals)



Hails from Sampaio Correa in Brazil and has only a tenuous link with Tunisia – a two-year stint at Etoile Sahel six years ago. Controversially offered a large inducement to accept the offer of Tunisian nationality just before the 2004 Nations Cup, where he was a star performer.

UKRAINE

Special delivery

Coach Blokhin promised direct qualification and in so doing gave his players belief

"IT IS A HUGE success for the independent Ukraine to be at the World Cup finals for the first time, a big boost for the country as a whole as well as Ukrainian football. I can assure every fan that we will not be underdogs this summer in Germany."

Ukraine fans have every reason to trust in the words of coach Oleh Blokhin, who delivered on his promise, made even before the draw for the World Cup qualifiers was made, that the team would reach the finals by topping their group.

In contrast to previous qualifying campaigns, Zbirna put in very solid performances against their main rivals, Turkey, Denmark and European champions Greece, apparently having shaken off their belief that they were a side capable only of fighting for a play-off berth.

And that development was the very reason Blokhin had made his bold qualification pledge. The former Soviet Union and Kyiv Dynamo striker felt that the fact that none of his predecessors had

claimed Ukraine would be direct qualifiers for a major finals prompted the players to grow pessimistic when it didn't happen and almost come to expect failure.

Blokhin's other major break with tradition was to treat all the players as equals, and not put Andrii Shevchenko on a pedestal, as previous coaches had done. The aim was to improve unity and team spirit, and that togetherness was evident as Ukraine cruised through the qualification campaign, in a so-called Group of Death, remaining unbeaten until their finals place had been secured.

"Sheva" is still clearly the key player for Ukraine, but he now has much more quality support from players such as Anatoliy Tymoshchuk, Oleh Husiev and Andrii Voronin.

Looking ahead to the finals, there is a good chance that Ukraine could go beyond the group stage. The players and fans welcomed the draw,

which pitted Ukraine with Spain, Tunisia and Saudi Arabia. The Spaniards are clear favourites to top Group H, but the other opponents look beatable. Tunisia, the former African champions, are an experienced side with a successful coach, Roger Lemerre. They play in a similar defensive style to Ukraine, but they find it hard to score. Saudi Arabia are regular participants in recent World Cup finals but as usual are something of an unknown quantity.

The prospect of seeing Ukraine in its first World Cup, and indeed its first major finals, has prompted a big run on tickets. The country more famous worldwide for the Chernobyl tragedy and the "Orange Revolution" in the political sphere than its football prowess, will go to Germany with nothing to lose. That could be a big advantage, psychologically, and although the team lack big-match experience, they have the solidity and balance to reach the last 16 at least.

'Blokhin broke with tradition by not putting Andrii Shevchenko on a pedestal'



Major player...Oleh Husiev offers quality support to Shevchenko



OLEG ZADERNOVSKY
IN KIEV

'I'll shave off my hair if we win the trophy!'

THE COACH: Oleh Blokhin



What are your thoughts on the draw?

Our team have already surpassed expectations just by reaching the World Cup. That allows us to try to do our best at the finals without fear, because we have nothing to lose. As for the group, all four teams have an equal chance of going through. The Spaniards need no introduction; Tunisia are former African champions with a lot of players at European clubs; the Saudis are something of an unknown force and are likely to benefit from having had the rare opportunity to gather as a squad for a couple of months before the finals.

Who are the most influential players in your squad?

Well, first of all our tactics are wholly reliant on us having

a collective strength. But of course we do have Andrii Shevchenko, who was our best player by far during the qualifiers. He was at his best when it was most needed and he led his team-mates by example.

What was your biggest challenge on taking the Ukraine job?

Before, I had worked only as a club coach, when I was with the players every day. With the Ukraine job, I didn't understand at first how I could prepare the team for a game in just 48 hours.

Have you changed the mentality of the national team players?

I have tried to instil a winning mentality, to rid the dressing-room of the feeling

SCHEDULE

MAY 18-25 Training camp in Belek, Turkey
MAY 28 Ukraine v Costa Rica (Kiev)
JUNE 1-9 Training camp in Switzerland
JUNE 2 Ukraine v Italy (Lausanne, Switzerland)
JUNE 5 Ukraine v Libya (Vollen, Switzerland)
JUNE 8 Ukraine v Luxembourg (Luxembourg)
JUNE 9 Squad travel to World Cup base — the Seminaris SeeHotel in Potsdam, a suburb of Berlin

WORLD CUP GROUP H

JUNE 14 Ukraine v Spain (Leipzig)
JUNE 19 Ukraine v Saudi Arabia (Hamburg)
JUNE 23 Ukraine v Tunisia (Berlin)

that the squad were underachievers. Also, I only wanted players who were committed to play for their country. That was definitely the most difficult task we had to overcome during the qualifying campaign.

Many pundits are predicting that these finals will throw up a lot of surprises. Is that your view?

More teams are capable of winning the tournament than ever before. The big surprise may come from one of the African countries. An African team has never won the World Cup, but the continent has produced a great number of outstanding

players, many of whom have starred at leading European clubs. We must also not overlook the fact that the African countries are now managed by experienced, renowned coaches.

How far can Ukraine go in Germany?

Realistically, our aim will be to progress beyond the group stage. Believing that Ukraine could win the tournament is no doubt a fantasy, although we have the recent example of Greece winning Euro 2004 completely against the odds. I have promised the fans I'll shave off my hair if we do lift the trophy!

'Some of our players will be nervous. I have to help them'

THE PLAYER: Andrii Shevchenko

How do you rate Ukraine's chances?

The finals are going to be a new experience for us and we'll try to progress as far as we can. Our principal aim is to qualify for the knockout stages.

How big a part did Oleh Blokhin play in the qualifying campaign?

Blokhin is a charismatic figure and one of the most important things he has brought to the job is his ability to inspire us.

What are Ukraine's greatest strengths?

We have a disciplined team who follow the tactical plan and show a one-for-all spirit. We are better defensively than we were, and have improved our ability to launch quick counter-attacks.

How do you view your group rivals?

The Spanish are the favourites, but don't forget how difficult they found it to qualify. Tunisia are quite a strong side with a lot of experience but do not have a good finals record. Saudi Arabia are the dark horses. We can play all of them without fear.

Who are your favourites to win the World Cup?

Modern football is quite unpredictable. Brazil, Italy, England, Argentina, Germany and France are the leading candidates, but a good number of other teams are able to compete with them. There are no weak teams at the World Cup finals.

How do you see your role as captain?

I do not want to be only a role model for my younger team-mates. I also want to be a friend and a colleague. I'm on an equal footing with all of

them on and off the pitch. I know that some of our players will be nervous at the finals. As captain, I have to help them play their game and be confident in their ability.

What is your message for your team-mates?

Our presence in the finals is a huge success for the development of Ukrainian football. Each of us has to concentrate on our forthcoming matches. By reaching the finals we've done only half the job; the much more difficult part lies ahead in Germany.





TACTICS

LIKE HIS PREDECESSORS, Oleh Blokhin employs a standard 4-4-2, which can be changed to a 4-5-1 to give a more solid midfield and a more counter-attacking style.

The goalkeeping position, which had looked decided, is now wide open following the injuries to undisputed No 1 Olexander Shovkovskiy and his deputy, Maxim Startsev. Both are struggling to be fit for the finals, giving the young, inexperienced Bogdan Shust an unlikely opportunity.

In defence, Blokhin will definitely use Andrii Rusol as sweeper, with Vladislav Vaschuk in reserve. The other centre-back position should go to the uncompromising but injury-prone Serhii Fedorov, for whom the most obvious deputy is Volodymyr Yezerskyi. The latter is also one of six contenders for the right-back slot, with Olexander Radchenko another of the options. Andrii Nesmachnyi is a certain starter at left-back.

The two holding midfielders are Anatoliy Tymoshchuk, who gets attacks rolling, and Andrii Husin, who provides a defensive shield. Oleh Husiev will certainly start on the right of midfield, with orders to push forward as aggressively as he can. Ruslan Rotan is very useful playing in behind the forwards, or, instead of him, Andrii Vorobei would be played on the left side. Blokhin requires his midfielders to work and chase, so athletic ability is as important as technical quality.

Andrii Shevchenko is the main striker, with Andrii Voronin in support, making forward runs from deep positions. Olexiy Bielik is the main forward option on the bench, with Oleh Venhlynskyi another possibility.

Oleh Blokhin

COACH 05.11.52



Played at two World Cups for the USSR, for whom he scored 42 goals in 112 games. European Footballer of the Year in 1975. First coaching roles were at Olympiakos and PAOK in Greece, took the Ukraine reins in September 2003. Has unquestioned authority over the players but has fostered a friendly atmosphere in the camp. Also a Communist Party MP.

Olexander Shovkovskiy

GOALKEEPER 02.01.75
Kyiv Dynamo
64 caps (0 goals)



Very reliable, long-standing first-choice keeper who kept six clean sheets in 12 qualifying matches. But is facing a struggle to be fully fit for the finals after breaking his collar bone earlier in the year.

Bogdan Shust

GOALKEEPER 04.03.86
Shakhtar Donetsk
1 cap (0 goals)



Signed by Shakhtar from Karpaty Lviv in January for £600,000, a domestic record for a keeper. Only 20 but may be called upon in Germany because of the injuries to Shovkovskiy and Startsev. A late developer; he did not even turn to football until he was 15.

Maxim Startsev

GOALKEEPER 20.01.80
Kryvbas
2 caps (0 goals)



Athletic keeper and an excellent shot-stopper who is the usual reserve for Shovkovskiy but has been sidelined for three months after undergoing a groin operation. A popular figure at Kryvbas, whom he joined in 2003 after five underwhelming seasons at Dnipro.

Serhii Fedorov

DEFENDER 18.02.75
Kyiv Dynamo
28 caps (1 goal)



Battling, never-say-die central defender who is also an attacking threat at corners but is injury-prone and so has not been the influence on the national team that he might have been. A product of the Dynamo youth system.

Andrii Nesmachnyi

DEFENDER 28.02.79
Kyiv Dynamo
45 caps (0 goals)



Tough-tackling, physically strong left-back who also has good attacking skills. Appeared in all but one of the qualifiers. Born in Russia but part of the Ukraine national team set-up since 2000. Plays billiards in his spare time.

Olexander Radchenko

DEFENDER 19.07.76
Dnipro
17 caps (0 goals)



Experienced, industrious defender but struggles when up against quality international strikers. Indeed, he is better going forward than in a defensive capacity. Currently at Dnipro after several seasons at Kyiv Dynamo.

Andrii Rusol

DEFENDER 16.01.83
Dnipro
18 caps (2 goals)



Sweeper who reads the game well and is calm in possession. Has been a tower of strength for Dnipro during the past two seasons and also an automatic first-choice since Blokhin took the Ukraine reins. Gets the odd goal as well, including two in the qualifiers.

Vyacheslav Shevchuk

DEFENDER 13.05.79
Shakhtar Donetsk
4 caps (0 goals)



Hard-tackling left-back who links well with his team-mates and is a good crosser. Can also play in midfield. Joined Shakhtar from Dnipro last summer. Previously had a spell at Russian side Shinnik and appeared close to taking out Russian citizenship.

Vladislav Vaschuk

DEFENDER 02.01.75
Kyiv Dynamo
54 caps (1 goal)



Central defender but can also play as a holding midfielder. Left Dynamo after a row with the president but is back following short spells at Spartak Moscow and Chornomorets. Also had a wilderness period with the national team, but reinstated by Blokhin. Owner of a trendy restaurant in Kiev.

Volodymyr Yezerskyi

DEFENDER 15.11.76
Dnipro
20 caps (0 goals)



Discarded by Kyiv Dynamo in 2000 but has rebuilt his career at Dnipro. Performed admirably on the left of defence in the World Cup qualifiers away to Turkey and Greece. Very disciplined and rarely gets caught out of position.

Oleh Husiev

MIDFIELDER 25.04.83
Kyiv Dynamo
22 caps (1 goal)



Aggressive, strong-running right-sided midfielder who is one of Ukraine's most exciting products of recent years. Joined Dynamo in summer 2003 after an exceptional season with city rivals Arsenal and was named Ukraine's Player of the Year for 2005. A keen coin collector.

Andrii Husin

MIDFIELDER 11.12.72
Kryliya Sovetov (Rus)
60 caps (10 goals)



Tall, intelligent midfield anchorman who tackles faultlessly and wins most of his aerial battles. One of Blokhin's key players. Started career as a striker at Karpaty Lviv, but switched to midfield during 10 seasons at Kyiv Dynamo. Wife Khrystyna is a top fashion designer.

Maxim Kalinichenko

MIDFIELDER 26.01.79
Spartak Moscow (Rus)
17 caps (1 goal)



On his day, an inspirational player who has good pace and skill, but is inconsistent. A product of Dnipro's youth system, he has been at Spartak Moscow since 2000 and has flourished in the Russian League.

Serhii Nazarenko

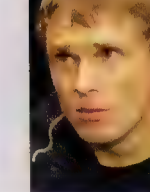
MIDFIELDER 16.02.80
Dnipro
11 caps (1 goal)



Exciting, creative midfielder who made a name for himself with his impressive performances for Dnipro in the UEFA Cup. A good reader of the game, also excellent at long-range passing and a free-kick specialist.

Serhii Rebrov

MIDFIELDER 06.03.74
Kyiv Dynamo
69 caps (14 goals)



Midfielder or forward who had a superb partnership with Shevchenko in the 1990s with Dynamo and Ukraine. Rejoined Dynamo last summer after five tough years in England and is enjoying a renaissance. Nicknamed Radiohead because he is a radio ham in his spare time.

Ruslan Rotan

MIDFIELDER 29.10.81
Kyiv Dynamo
14 caps (2 goals)



Baby-faced midfield schemer and free-kick expert. Has made huge progress since joining Dynamo from Dnipro for a domestic record £2.5m in 2005 and is now an automatic first-choice for Ukraine. Good dribbler and has an eye for goal. Roberto Baggio is his role model.

Oleh Shelaiev

MIDFIELDER 05.11.76
Dnipro
15 caps (0 goals)



Powerful, skilful central midfielder but played in several positions during the qualifiers including the problematic right-back slot. Joined Dnipro in 2000 following several less-than-successful years at Shakhtar Donetsk. Did not win his first cap until he was 28.

Anatoliy Tymoshchuk

MIDFIELDER 30.03.79
Shakhtar Donetsk
52 caps (1 goal)



Tireless, determined holding midfielder who has been a key man for Shakhtar and Ukraine over the past four seasons. The country's Footballer of the Year in 2004. His sister was captain of the national basketball team.

Andrii Vorobei

MIDFIELDER 29.11.78
Shakhtar Donetsk
48 caps (5 goals)



An attacking midfielder who prefers to play – and is most dangerous – just in behind the strikers. Was League top scorer with 21 goals in 2001. Came up through the ranks at Shakhtar.

Also in contention

Keeper **VYACHESLAV KERNOZENKO** (04.06.76; Dnipro; 2 caps, 0 goals) was blamed for the home World Cup qualifying defeat against Poland in September 2000 and has been in the wilderness ever since, but is restaking a claim with good club form.

The reliable **SERHII MATIUKHIN** (21.03.80; Dnipro; 3 caps, 0 goals) can play anywhere in defence; right-back **VYACHESLAV SVIDERSKIY** (01.01.79; Arsenal Kyiv; 1 cap, 0 goals) has been in impressive form in the League; Jesus lookalike **DMYTRO CHYGRYSKYI** (07.11.86; Shakhtar Donetsk; 0 caps) is a defender with great potential; and the rapidly maturing **OLEXANDER YATSENKO** (24.02.85; FC Kharkiv; 1 cap, 0 goals) would be a good reserve for Fedorov.

SERHII SHYSHCHENKO (13.01.76; Metalurh Zaporizhzhya; 14 caps, 1 goal) is an experienced and mobile right-sided midfielder. Kyiv Dynamo youth scheme graduate **OLEXANDER MAKSIMOV** (13.02.85; FC Kharkiv; 1 cap, 0 goals) could come into consideration as a reserve for one of the holding midfield positions.

Powerful forward **SERHII SEREBRENNIKOV** (01.09.76; Charleroi, Blg; 12 caps, 1 goal) recently caught Blokhin's eye again and could make a return to the national team set-up; **OLEXANDER KOSYRIN** (18.06.77; Metalurh Donetsk; 7 caps, 0 goals) is a key forward for his club, though so far ineffective for Ukraine; and Belarus-born striker **ARTEM MILEVSKIY** (12.01.85; Kyiv Dynamo; 0 caps) has started to fulfil his potential.

Olexiy Bielik

FORWARD 15.02.81
Shakhtar Donetsk
11 caps (2 goals)



Dynamic, aggressive forward who was hailed as the "next Shevchenko" in his youth but has not quite fulfilled his potential. Not a regular starter with Shakhtar and will most likely deputise for Voronin in Germany.

Andrii Shevchenko

FORWARD 29.09.76
Milan (Ita)
63 caps (27 goals)



World-class goal machine and team captain. He is Ukraine's all-time top scorer and has hit 127 goals in 300 League games for Milan, whom he joined from Kyiv Dynamo for £16m in 1999. Close friend of the Armani family and married to American model Kristen Pazik.

Oleh Venhlynskyi

FORWARD 21.03.78
AEK Athens (Gre)
10 caps (1 goal)



Spent six seasons in the Kyiv Dynamo reserves and proved his abilities only after moving to Dnipro in 2004, scoring some important goals in the UEFA Cup. Signed by AEK last year for a bargain £300,000 but has been plagued by injuries.

Andrii Voronin

FORWARD 21.07.79
Bayer Leverkusen (Ger)
28 caps (3 goals)



Energetic battler with good control. Also the team leader in the absence of Shevchenko. A product of the Chornomorets Odessa youth school but has never played senior club football in Ukraine since he moved to Borussia Monchengladbach at 18. Advertises Coca-Cola in Ukraine.

UNITED STATES



PAUL GARDNER
IN NEW YORK



Overachievers...the USA have risen to become the world's fourth-ranked international team

'They are athletes with growing tactical savvy but will win few points for entertainment value'

The USA's rise to a position among the major soccer powers has come swiftly. In 1990, when they qualified for their first World Cup in 40 years, they were ranked 34th in the world. Sixteen years later they are ranked — no doubt over-ranked — in fourth place. Coach Bruce Arena can call upon an experienced group of players, many playing in Europe, and MLS, the domestic league, has proved it can produce players of international calibre.

It's a solid team, full of sturdy, well-built American athletes with growing tactical savvy and skill levels. A team that will not beat themselves, for sure, but a rather straightforward team that won't garner many points for entertainment value.

Yet the answer to that drawback — and it is a worrying drawback in a country that needs to attract new fans to the sport — is at hand, and it's a chastening thought for the rest of the world: the USA has so far failed to make much use of its huge and growing reservoir of Latin talent.

Deeply established

Soccer is already deeply established at youth level in the country; it's part of the everyday life of millions of average American families. But the professional game, hemmed in by baseball, gridiron and basketball, has yet to make a strong impact.

For football in the USA, the conundrum remains: how to translate all that youth involvement into interest at the professional and international level. The USA's strong showing in the 2002 World Cup was not reflected in any sudden increase in domestic league attendances.

That ongoing failure provides ammunition for the soccer-haters in the media who always sound loudest around World Cup time, bludgeoning the public with reminders that soccer is boring and that Americans like only sports played with the hands. Ho hum. Their protests get shriller and shriller, but the sport does not go away.

Football's fan base is growing, but slowly. Average attendances in MLS are in the OK-bracket of 15,000. Where it was once difficult to find any soccer on TV, there are now two channels devoted exclusively to the sport. All 64 World Cup games will be broadcast live in high-definition format.

Support for the national team comes from a wide spectrum of society, including the super-fans of Sam's Army. Americans are avid travellers — so there will be plenty of fans cheering for the USA in Germany.

On the whole, media expectations are cautiously optimistic — in line with Arena's confidence that his team can get out of the first round... "and then we'll see".

the Czech Republic — plus the unknown but menacing quantity that is Ghana. Realistically, a second-place finish is the best that can be hoped for — and that would advance the USA into a second round game against the winners of Group F, surely Brazil.

Hard act to follow

A repeat of 2002's quarter-final finish is unlikely with a tough group and Brazil lurking in the second round

IF THE AIM IS always to do better than last time, then the USA — surprise quarter-finalists four years ago — have to reach the semi-finals in Germany. How likely is that?

Not very. The team's group is tough: they face two of the strongest European teams — Italy and

'This is a stronger group of players than in 2002'

THE COACH: Bruce Arena

How does it feel to be ranked fourth in the world?

No different from how it felt when we were ranked fifth or sixth. Anyway, we all know that the only rankings that

matter are how you do in the World Cup.

Italy, the Czech Republic and Ghana — a pretty tough group?

Yes, but I'm not at all disappointed by the draw. I think it's great. You've got to play good teams.

You play the Czechs in the first game. Is it a game you dare not lose?

I don't look at it as if we lose we're out — but losing the first game does put your back to the wall.

Will you play a cautious game, then?

Our goal is to win the game. We don't do well with that kind of cautious posture.



Is central defence a weak spot? Eddie Pope with no European experience, plus either Oguchi Onyewu or Cory Gibbs — both rookies?

Not at all. It's Pope's third World Cup, and anyway there are pretty good centre-backs around the world who do not play in Europe. Onyewu and Gibbs both play in Europe.

What about the rest of the team?

In midfield a lot will depend on the fitness of Claudio Reyna and John O'Brien. In attack, it's Brian McBride and either Josh Wolff or Eddie Johnson. Johnson's fit again, but not in good form. After that not too many people have stepped up. But

SCHEDULE

MAY 23 United States v Morocco (Nashville)
MAY 26 United States v Venezuela (Cleveland)
MAY 28 United States v Latvia (East Hartford)
JUNE 2 Squad travel to World Cup base — the Park Hyatt hotel in Hamburg

WORLD CUP GROUP E

JUNE 12 United States v Czech Republic (Gelsenkirchen)
JUNE 17 United States v Italy (Kaiserslautern)
JUNE 22 United States v Ghana (Nuremberg)

[midfielders] Landon Donovan and DaMarcus Beasley can play as forwards. On paper, this is a stronger squad than in 2002. There are better options than four years ago.

You'll have a mixture of MLS-based and Europe-based players — how does that work?

It's a strange phenomenon. MLS are starting their season, the Europeans are at the climax of theirs, so the Europeans are generally in better form. It's an awkward predicament to bring them together. And I do find it absurd that, this year, World Cup year, FIFA gave us only one international date, March 1. There's a lot of work ahead — in a short period of time.

Is there anything you learned in 2002 that will be applied in Germany?

The only thing we'll do differently is to be sure to go in with 23 players who are close to 100 per cent fit; we can't go in there with some noticeable injuries. There were too many question marks last time.

How's the confidence level?

Hopefully, good. For a player in the United States this doesn't get any better; it's a great opportunity, exciting, enjoyable. That's why the draw didn't disappoint me. Can there be a bigger challenge, better opponents than Italy — for their World Cup history and status as a world power?

Interview by Paul Gardner

'We are not being taken lightly any more'

THE PLAYER: Claudio Reyna

How do you see the US team going into the World Cup? What's your frame of mind?

We have a lot of players who were at the last World Cup, but there are eight to 10 new players and it's important that they know that playing in a World Cup is not like anything else — even for those who are used to the pressure of big matches. So much is riding on three games, whereas in the season you can go through bad form and still come out of it. At the World Cup, you have to be ready to go, fully focused and prepared. Really, it's like a little four-team tournament for

everyone and then you see where it takes you from there. Getting out of your group is an amazing achievement — our aim is to get to the knockout stages again.

Getting out of your group would certainly be amazing. It couldn't be more difficult.

Ours is the toughest group, no doubt, but there is a positive reading of it. The very definition of Group of Death is a group with four very good teams in it, and we are one of them. So that has to encourage us because it means we are not being taken lightly any more.

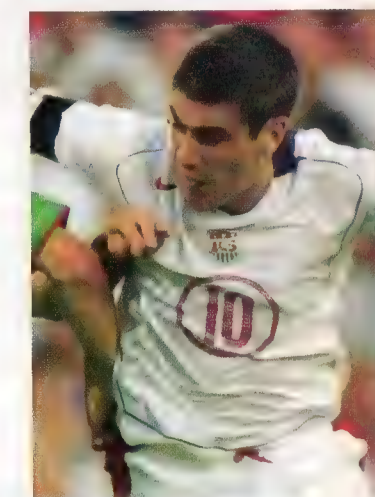
What are the team's qualities?

We're organised, we're very hard-working, we play well, we have pace. Our workrate and fitness levels are vital. In the past we had maybe 13 or 14 players, but now we have 20 to 25 we can really use. The squad is not huge but there are definitely more options than four years ago.

Where does the balance lie between having a strong domestic league and international players getting vital experience abroad?

It's important that we have good players back home for the League but it's difficult

because good players still dream of playing in Europe. If players can come over to Europe and play, then it makes sense, but if players are coming over and not playing at a good level or are sitting on the bench, you have to ask whether they might be better off back in MLS. Some are in the national team because they are doing well in MLS, while there are others slipping from the side because they are not getting a regular game in Europe. You have to decide — you make more money in Europe, but a lot of players like staying at home, close to friends and family.



Will soccer ever compete with other sports in the US?

No, it won't ever be No 1. If we reach the same heights as 2002, it would be a big, big boost, but it will never be like England, Brazil or Argentina. And anyway, the sport can't go forward just because of the World Cup, it needs MLS to progress as well.

Interview by Sid Lowe



UNITED STATES



TACTICS

AGAINST THEORETICALLY inferior opponents, Bruce Arena uses a 4-3-3, verging on a 3-3-4, with high pressuring of opponents all over the pitch. Against strong teams, he switches to 4-3-1-2, with more selective pressuring and with forward Landon Donovan dropping back into more of a midfield role.

Donovan is the key man – for his passing, his goalscoring and his inspirational presence. DaMarcus Beasley can win games with a moment of magic, but his impact is less consistent.

The USA's flank play is important: crosses must be supplied for forward Brian McBride to head at goal or knock down for his smaller, quicker strike partner, Josh Wolff or possibly Eddie Johnson. Full-backs Steve Cherundolo and, especially, Eddie Lewis, are accurate crossers.

Midfield organisation comes from captain Claudio Reyna, but the unit lacks muscle. The versatile Pablo Mastroeni, often a defender, may have to play the "enforcer" role since first-choice John O'Brien is struggling for fitness.

Eddie Pope is a given as one of the central defenders, with his partner any one from impressive youngster Oguchi Onyewu, veteran Gregg Berhalter, Cory Gibbs, Mastroeni or full-back Carlos Bocanegra. Cherundolo is a fixture at right-back; Lewis, Hejduk, Bocanegra and Gibbs are the left-side candidates. Kasey Keller is first-choice from a strong group of keepers because of his maturity and big-game experience.

Arena has always had good relations with his players. "We're a team," he says. "Our strength has always been playing as a group, having a good mentality as a unit."

Bruce Arena

COACH 21.09.51

For Arena, basic soccer is the formula: reliable, skilful but straightforward players in every position, with uncomplicated tactics to match. And it has brought the former keeper great success. Two League titles with DC United and reaching the 2002 World Cup quarter-finals with the US. Appointed in 1998, he's the longest serving national coach in the world.

Marcus Hahnemann

GOALKEEPER 15.06.72
Reading (Eng)
6 caps (0 goals)

Moved to England in 1999 after two years in MLS and now a key player for Premier League-bound Reading. Aggressive and vocal, he is well-known for throwing his jersey to the fans after each game. Like Keller, he was born in the north-western state of Washington.

Steve Cherundolo

DEFENDER 19.02.79
Hannover (Ger)
33 caps (1 goal)

Small (5ft 6in), smiling, speedy and skilful, he allies tenacious tackling with excellent passing and distribution. His eight years with Hannover have greatly improved his tactical awareness. A serious knee injury sidelined him for the 2002 World Cup.

Eddie Pope

DEFENDER 24.12.73
Real Salt Lake
78 caps (8 goals)

Steady Eddie. The 32-year-old centre-back may be slowing down physically, but the intelligence and mental speed – very necessary to compensate for so-so tackling – are as sharp as ever. Also strong in the air, making him a goal threat at set-pieces.

Pat Noonan

MIDFIELDER 02.08.80
New England Revolution
13 caps (1 goal)

Reliable, straightforward, hard-shooting wide midfielder who never shirks his defensive duties. A consistent goalscorer for New England – 10 in 2003, 11 in 2004, eight in 2005 – but has only once got on the scoresheet for the USA.

Eddie Johnson

FORWARD 31.03.84
Kansas City Wizards
15 caps (9 goals)

A real sensation during the qualifiers in 2005, notching seven goals in seven games. That added to his fabulous record of 37 goals in 51 internationals with the US youth teams (Under-17, Under-20 and Under-23). Has blazing speed, a cool head and an accurate shot.

Tim Howard

GOALKEEPER 06.03.79
Manchester United (Eng)
15 caps (0 goals)

Superbly athletic keeper, capable of making big saves but also prone to big errors. Manchester United's first-choice in 2003-04, but now plays second fiddle to Holland's Edwin van der Sar. Has overcome the effects of the neurological disorder Tourette's syndrome to build his career.

Cory Gibbs

DEFENDER 14.01.80
Den Haag (Hol)
18 caps (0 goals)

Can play either centrally or on the left of defence. Sidelined by a knee injury for most of last year. The son of Jamaican parents and spent much of his youth in Kingston. Joined German club St Pauli in 2001; later played with Dallas, then returned to Europe with Feyenoord and now Den Haag.

DaMarcus Beasley

MIDFIELDER 24.05.82
PSV Eindhoven (Hol)
55 caps (12 goals)

The slender left-footer is unpredictable, a major problem for his markers. Also scores unexpected and unusual goals. The first American to play in a Champions League semi-final (for PSV in 2005). Nicknamed Jitter, short for jitterbug, which says everything about his unsettling style.

John O'Brien

MIDFIELDER 29.08.77
Chivas USA
29 caps (3 goals)

Joined the Ajax youth academy in 1994 and was a regular first-teamer by 2001. Now back in the US. Has undoubted mastery of midfield skills, especially the attacking variety, but serious injuries (including groin, hamstring and Achilles tendon) have hampered his progress.

Brian McBride

FORWARD 19.06.72
Fulham (Eng)
90 caps (29 goals)

Six-footer who, not surprisingly, is good in the air but also has plenty of skill on the ground. Second in the USA's all-time scoring list and was the first player to be picked in the first-ever MLS draft in 1996. Suffered a life-threatening pulmonary embolism in 2001.

Kasey Keller

GOALKEEPER 29.11.69
Monchengladbach (Ger)
91 caps (0 goals)

Although a veteran of three World Cups, the 36-year-old has played in only two finals games and this is his first tournament as undisputed first-choice. Never flashy, always composed and reliable, and has over 15 years of European experience – from spells in England, Spain and Germany.

Frankie Hejduk

DEFENDER 05.08.74
Columbus Crew
72 caps (5 goals)

Unorthodox defender or midfielder with the attacking skills of a winger but is hardly the most accurate of crossers. The team's free spirit, a surfing fanatic and an admirer of Bob Marley, whom he honours with a reggae-dance goalscoring celebration.

Bobby Convey

MIDFIELDER 27.05.83
Reading (Eng)
36 caps (1 goal)

Another left-footed attacking midfielder, speedy, tireless and always looking for the ball. Turned pro aged 17 with DC United, becoming the youngest player in MLS. Made his USA debut at the same age, against Brazil. Moved to Reading after five seasons with DC.

Claudio Reyna

MIDFIELDER 20.07.73
Manchester City (Eng)
108 caps (8 goals)

Captain and key figure, he brings calm to a sometimes hectic midfield. The wily playmaker is a clever dribbler, superb passer and occasional scorer. In his fourth World Cup so has great experience, but is injury-prone. Born in the US to an Argentinian father and a Portuguese mother.

Taylor Twellman

FORWARD 29.02.80
New England Revolution
19 caps (5 goals)

Joined 1860 Munich from college but played only reserve team games. Then joined New England, where his opportunism and bravery have brought him 41 goals and the MLS Most Valuable Player award in 2005. Not as prolific for the USA, for whom his father Tim played once in 1982.

Gregg Berhalter

DEFENDER 01.08.73
Energie Cottbus (Ger)
44 caps (0 goals)

Solid left-footed central defender who is a favourite of Arena. Played two splendid games as a substitute at the 2002 finals, against Mexico and Germany. His heading, tackling and marking are the strengths, but slowness on the turn and in recovery are now major problems.

Pablo Mastroeni

DEFENDER 26.08.76
Colorado Rapids
46 caps (0 goals)

The most versatile player in the squad, equally at home in the back four as he is as an attacking or holding midfielder. His strong points are workrate and close control, which allows him to go on dangerous dribbles. Reckless fouling is a problem. Born in Argentina, moved to the US aged four.

Clint Dempsey

MIDFIELDER 09.03.83
New England Revolution
19 caps (4 goals)

A classic high-energy American midfielder, except that his interest in the Latin game has helped give him a higher-than-usual level of ball skills and attacking flair. Among his inventive goal celebrations is a prodigious baseball swing. A free-style rapper in his spare time.

Landon Donovan

FORWARD 04.03.82
Los Angeles Galaxy
78 caps (25 goals)

Along with Reyna, he is the key to a good team performance. Offers speed and guile, dribbling skills, swerving runs, inventive passing and goals. May have something to prove in Germany as he has been criticised for twice returning to the US after failed spells at German clubs.

Josh Wolff

FORWARD 25.02.77
Kansas City Wizards
45 caps (9 goals)

At his best in the penalty area, where his lightning-fast reactions, intelligent movement and sure touch make him a deadly finisher. Hampered by a series of injuries. Learned his soccer in the state of Georgia, a sure sign the sport has spread beyond the traditional big-city hot spots.

Carlos Bocanegra

DEFENDER 25.05.79
Fulham (Eng)
39 caps (6 goals)

A formidable presence in the back four, where he can play centrally or out wide. Has plenty of speed and commitment but tends to foul too much and is unlikely to win a starting berth. Born in California and a devotee of Mexican food.

Oguchi Onyewu

DEFENDER 13.05.82
Standard Liege (Bel)
12 caps (1 goal)

At 24, the youngest of the US defenders, and at 6ft 4in the tallest. Also the quietest. Known as Gooch to his friends, he is the son of Nigerian parents. Had a spell at Metz in France then signed for Standard Liege in 2005 after a loan spell. Good in the air. Distribution needs work.

Eddie Lewis

MIDFIELDER 17.05.74
Leeds (Eng)
68 caps (8 goals)

Left-footed attacking midfielder but also a leading candidate to play left-back. Known for his super-accurate crosses, and can also hit powerful, swerving free-kicks. Joined Fulham in 2000; now at Leeds – neither a great location for his pastimes of skiing and surfing.

Also in contention

KEVIN HARTMAN (25.05.74; Los Angeles Galaxy; 5 caps, 0 goals) is a contender for the third keeper spot after some solid performances last year for Galaxy, the MLS champions.

Former winger **CHRIS ALBRIGHT** (14.01.79; Los Angeles Galaxy; 19 caps, 1 goal) adds a strong attacking dimension to the right-back position. **JIMMY CONRAD** (12.02.77; Kansas City Wizards; 13 caps, 0 goals) is a rugged, reliable central defender, who would also be suitable for the midfield enforcer role if necessary.

Injuries have been a problem for **BEN OLSEN** (03.05.77; DC United; 33 caps, 6 goals), a small but tough midfield dynamo who gets goals, too. Right midfielder **STEVE RALSTON** (14.06.74; New England Revolution; 33 caps, 4 goals) is a tactically disciplined Arena stalwart, while **KERRY ZAVAGNIN** (02.07.74; Kansas City Wizards; 21 caps, 0 goals) is a play-it-simple guy who may be required as a holding midfielder, a weak area among the squad probabilities.

Forward **BRIAN CHING** (24.05.78; Houston Dynamo; 17 caps, 3 goals) is similar in build and style to McBride. A slick finisher at club level but, like Twellman, has had trouble carrying that form into the national team.

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HOW TO PLAY

- 1) Managers must select 1 Goalkeeper, 4 Defenders, 3 Midfielders & 3 Strikers.
- 2) Players must be selected in the positions attributed to them in the official player list (opposite).
- 3) A player can only be selected in a team once.
- 4) The combined value of your 11 players must not exceed £60m.
- 5) There is no limit to the number of players you can select from any one country.

HOW TO SCORE

- 1) Only points scored in the 2006 World Cup finals will count.
- 2) Clean-sheet points are awarded to a player who has played 60 mins or more.
- 3) Key Goal Contributions will be awarded at the sole discretion of the appointed judging panel.
- 4) Goalkeepers and Defenders only lose points for conceding whilst on the pitch.

- 5) A player receiving 2 Yellow Cards and then a Red Card will score -3 pts.
- 6) Action from extra-time but not penalty shoot-outs is included in the points scoring.
- 7) All Scores and League tables will be updated within 1 hour of matches finishing.

TRANSFERS

A Transfer Amnesty will run until the kick-off of the tournament so you can change your line-up in case of injuries. There is no extra cost for online transfers but phone transfers will cost 60p/min (see hotline number).

During the tournament each team is allowed a further 12 transfers.

These substitutions cost 50p each (minimum £1.50 online spend) and work on a daily basis with cut-off time 15 minutes before kick-off of the first match. Transfers made after will come into effect for the following day.

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- 1) **ONLINE** at www.worldsoccer.com/ytm – payment via credit/debit card at a cost of £5 or £8 (to include all transfers at 50% discount). All teams must be registered in the same session to take advantage of the '5 teams for the price of 4' offer.
- 2) **BY PHONE**. Call 0901 609 4625 (ROI 1550 719 775). Stay on the

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2nd - £1,000 (1,400 Euros)			
only available online			

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POINTS SYSTEM

POINTS	GOALKEEPERS	DEFENDERS	MIDFIELDERS	STRIKERS
1	1	1	1	1
2	2	2	2	2
3	3	3	3	3
4	4	4	4	4
5	5	5	5	5
6	6	6	6	6
7	7	7	7	7
8	8	8	8	8
9	9	9	9	9
10	10	10	10	10
11	11	11	11	11
12	12	12	12	12
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31	31	31	31	31
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43	43	43	43	43
44	44	44	44	44
45	45	45	45	45
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89	89	89	89	89
90	90	90	90	90
91	91	91	91	91
92	92	92	92	92
93	93	93	93	93
94	94	94	94	94
95	95	95	95	95
96	96	96	96	96
97	97	97	97	97
98	98	98	98	98
99	99	99	99	99
100	100	100	100	100

GOALKEEPERS

NAME	CODE	COUN	EM
Roberto Abbondanzieri	100	ARG	5.5
Mark Schwarzer	101	AUS	3.5
Dida	102	BRA	5.5
Tomislav Butina	103	CRO	3.5
Petr Cech	104	CZE	5.5
Paul Robinson	105	ENG	5.5
Gregory Coupet	106	FRA	5.5
Oliver Kahn	107	GER	5.5
Gianluigi Buffon	108	ITA	6.5
Yoshikatsu Kawaguchi	109	JAP	2.5
Oswaldo Sanchez	110	MEX	3.5
Edwin van der Sar	111	NLD	5.5
Artur Boruc	112	POL	3.5
Ricardo	113	POR	4.5
Dragoslav Jevric	114	S&M	3.5
Lee Woon-jae	115	SKR	2.5
Iker Casillas	116	SPA	5.5
Andreas Isaksson	117	SWE	4.5
Pascal Zuberbuhler	118	SWI	2.5
Alexander Shovkovskiy	119	UKR	3.5
Kasey Keller	120	USA	3.5

DEFENDERS

NAME	CODE	COUN	EM
Yamba Asha	200	ARG	2.5
Juan Pablo Sorin	201	ARG	7.5
Javier Zanetti	202	ARG	6.5
Roberto Ayala	204	ARG	6.5
Walter Samuel	205	AUS	5.5
Lucas Neil	206	AUS	3.5
Stan Lazaridis	207	AUS	3.5
Tony Popovic	208	BRA	7.5
Roberto Carlos	209	BRA	7.5
Cafu	210	BRA	7.5
Lucio	211	BRA	6.5
Juan	212	COS	2.5
Douglas Sequeira	213	COS	2.5

GOALKEEPERS

NAME	CODE	COUN	EM
Roberto Abbondanzieri	100	ARG	5.5
Mark Schwarzer	101	AUS	3.5
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Tomislav Butina	103	CRO	3.5
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Lucas Neil	206	AUS	3.5
Stan Lazaridis	207	AUS	3.5
Tony Popovic	208	BRA	7.5
Roberto Carlos	209	BRA	7.5
Cafu	210	BRA	7.5
Lucio	211	BRA	6.5
Juan	212	COS	2.5
Douglas Sequeira	213	COS	2.5

POINTS SYSTEM

Team Jersey		4 points
Team Formation		4 points
Total		
Defence		
Goal	1 point	
Goalkeeper	1 point	
Defender	1 point	
Attack		
Striker	1 point	
Midfielder	1 point	
Goalkeeper	1 point	
Goalkeeping		
Goalkeeper	1 point	
Goalkeeping		
Goalkeeper	1 point	

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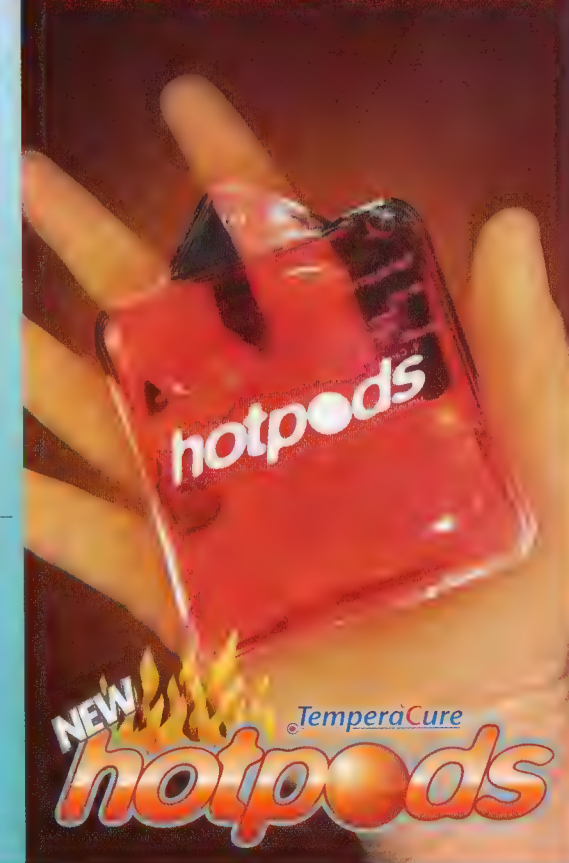


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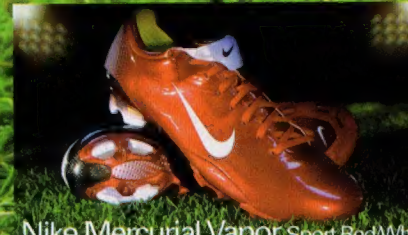
Nike Tiempo Legend R10 Gold/White
£89.99 Sizes: 6-13 Inc 1/2's pds 002 009 836



Nike Tiempo Legend St. George
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Nike Mercurial Vapor Platinum/Sport Red
£119.99 Sizes: 6-13 Inc 1/2's pds 002 009 607



Nike Mercurial Vapor Sport Red/White
£119.99 Sizes: 6-13 Inc 1/2's pds 002 009 614



Nike Air Zoom Total 90 IV Royal Blue
£119.99 Sizes: 6-13 Inc 1/2's pds 002 009 640



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Puma vT 06 FG Unseen Green
£99.99 Sizes: 6-13 Inc 1/2's pds 002 010 453



Puma vT 06 FG Black/White
£99.99 Sizes: 6-13 Inc 1/2's pds 002 010 450



Puma vKonstrukt FG In's Blue/Gold
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2. The Sex Disease Clinic
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3. Is Quentin There?
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4. It's The Phone Engineer
...doing a test, laugh as your victim sings and shouts!
5. Wrong Number!
...not a happy chap, your victim called him at a bad time!
6. A Special Delivery For You
...calling to arrange delivery of dodgy products off the net!
7. You're Live On The Radio
...it's the radio producer - your victim is live on air in 30secs!
8. The Dating Agency
...here are your victim's first responses to their new ad!
9. It's Reality TV
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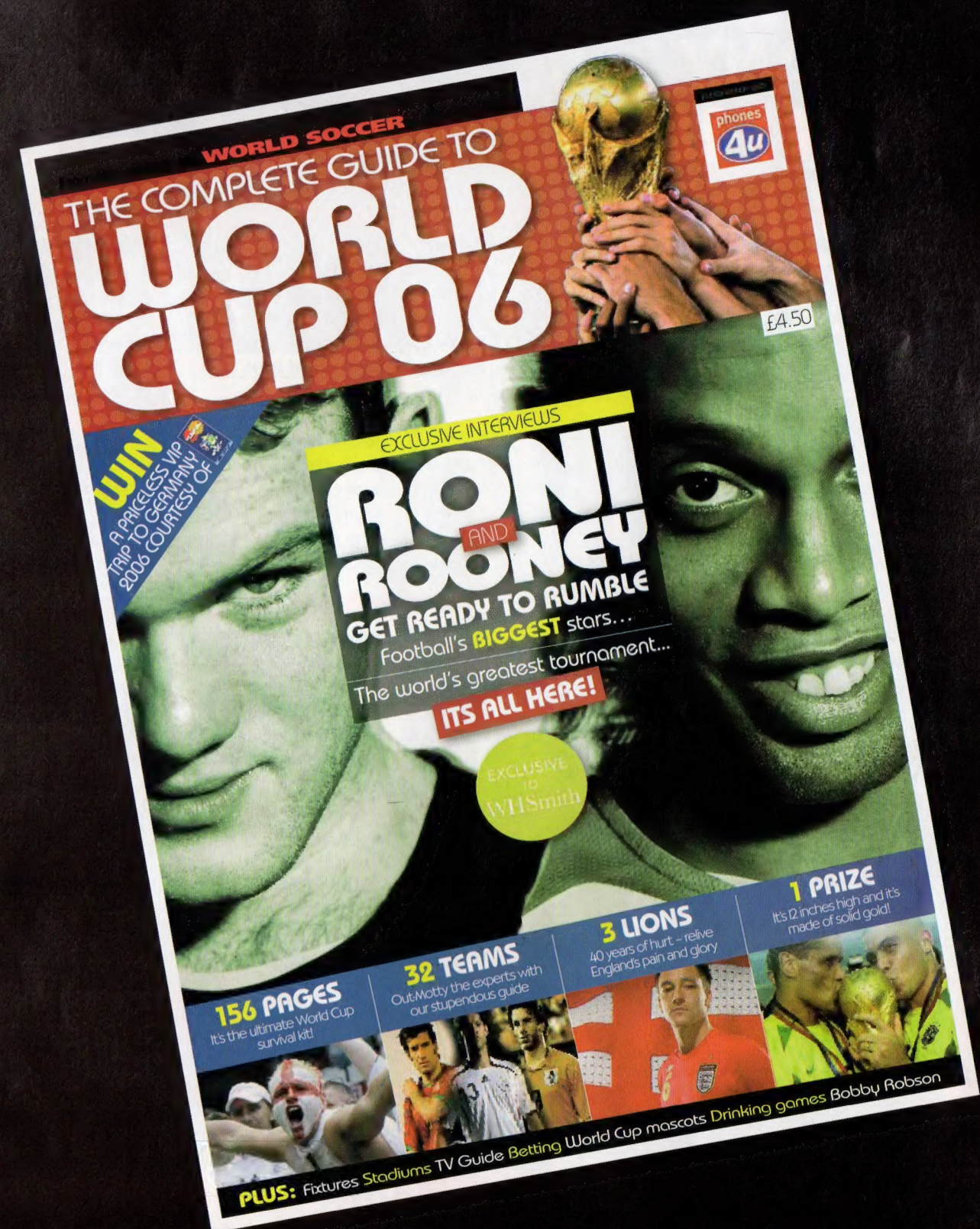
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GERMANY 2006 – SCHEDULE

GROUP A

Fri, June 9	Germany v Costa Rica	Munich	18:00
Fri, June 9	Poland v Ecuador	Gelsenkirchen	21:00
Wed, June 14	Germany v Poland	Dortmund	21:00
Thu, June 15	Ecuador v Costa Rica	Hamburg	15:00
Tue, June 20	Ecuador v Germany	Berlin	16:00
Tue, June 20	Costa Rica v Poland	Hanover	16:00

GROUP B

Sat, June 10	England v Paraguay	Frankfurt	15:00
Sat, June 10	Trinidad & Tobago v Sweden	Dortmund	18:00
Thu, June 15	England v Trinidad & Tobago	Nuremberg	18:00
Thu, June 15	Sweden v Paraguay	Berlin	21:00
Tue, June 20	Sweden v England	Cologne	21:00
Tue, June 20	Paraguay v Trinidad & Tobago	Kaiserslautern	21:00

GROUP C

Sat, June 10	Argentina v Ivory Coast	Hamburg	21:00
Sun, June 11	Serbia & Montenegro v Holland	Leipzig	15:00
Fri, June 16	Argentina v Serbia & Montenegro	Gelsenkirchen	15:00
Fri, June 16	Holland v Ivory Coast	Stuttgart	18:00
Wed, June 21	Holland v Argentina	Frankfurt	21:00
Wed, June 21	Ivory Coast v Serbia & Montenegro	Munich	21:00

GROUP D

Sun, June 11	Mexico v Iran	Nuremberg	18:00
Sun, June 11	Angola v Portugal	Cologne	21:00
Fri, June 16	Mexico v Angola	Hanover	21:00
Sat, June 17	Portugal v Iran	Frankfurt	15:00
Wed, June 21	Portugal v Mexico	Gelsenkirchen	16:00
Wed, June 21	Iran v Angola	Leipzig	16:00

GROUP E

Mon, June 12	United States v Czech Republic	Gelsenkirchen	18:00
Mon, June 12	Italy v Ghana	Hanover	21:00
Sat, June 17	Czech Republic v Ghana	Cologne	18:00
Sat, June 17	Italy v United States	Kaiserslautern	21:00
Thu, June 22	Czech Republic v Italy	Hamburg	16:00
Thu, June 22	Ghana v United States	Nuremberg	16:00

GROUP F

Mon, June 12	Australia v Japan	Kaiserslautern	15:00
Tue, June 13	Brazil v Croatia	Berlin	21:00
Sun, June 18	Japan v Croatia	Nuremberg	15:00
Sun, June 18	Brazil v Australia	Munich	18:00
Thu, June 22	Japan v Brazil	Dortmund	21:00
Thu, June 22	Croatia v Australia	Stuttgart	21:00

GROUP G

Tue, June 13	South Korea v Togo	Frankfurt	15:00
Tue, June 13	France v Switzerland	Stuttgart	18:00
Sun, June 18	France v South Korea	Leipzig	21:00
Mon, June 19	Togo v Switzerland	Dortmund	15:00
Fri, June 23	Togo v France	Cologne	21:00
Fri, June 23	Switzerland v South Korea	Hanover	21:00

GROUP H

Wed, June 14	Spain v Ukraine	Leipzig	15:00
Wed, June 14	Tunisia v Saudi Arabia	Munich	18:00
Mon, June 19	Saudi Arabia v Ukraine	Hamburg	18:00
Mon, June 19	Spain v Tunisia	Stuttgart	21:00
Fri, June 23	Saudi Arabia v Spain	Kaiserslautern	16:00
Fri, June 23	Ukraine v Tunisia	Berlin	16:00

SECOND ROUND

Sat, June 24	Gp A 1st v Gp B 2nd	Munich	17:00 (SR1)
Sat, June 24	Gp C 1st v Gp D 2nd	Leipzig	21:00 (SR2)
Sun, June 25	Gp B 1st v Gp A 2nd	Stuttgart	17:00 (SR3)
Sun, June 25	Gp D 1st v Gp C 2nd	Nuremberg	21:00 (SR4)
Mon, June 26	Gp E 1st v Gp F 2nd	Kaiserslautern	17:00 (SR5)
Mon, June 26	Gp G 1st v Gp H 2nd	Cologne	21:00 (SR6)
Tue, June 27	Gp F 1st v Gp E 2nd	Dortmund	17:00 (SR7)
Tue, June 27	Gp H 1st v Gp G 2nd	Hanover	21:00 (SR8)

QUARTER-FINALS

Fri, June 30	Winners SR1 v Winners SR2	Berlin	17:00 (QF1)
Fri, June 30	Winners SR5 v Winners SR6	Hamburg	21:00 (QF2)
Sat, July 1	Winners SR3 v Winners SR4	Gelsenkirchen	17:00 (QF3)
Sat, July 1	Winners SR7 v Winners SR8	Frankfurt	21:00 (QF4)

SEMI-FINALS

Tue, July 4	Winners QF1 v Winners QF2	Dortmund	21:00
Wed, July 5	Winners QF3 v Winners QF4	Munich	21:00

THIRD-PLACE PLAY-OFF

Sat, July 8		Stuttgart	21:00
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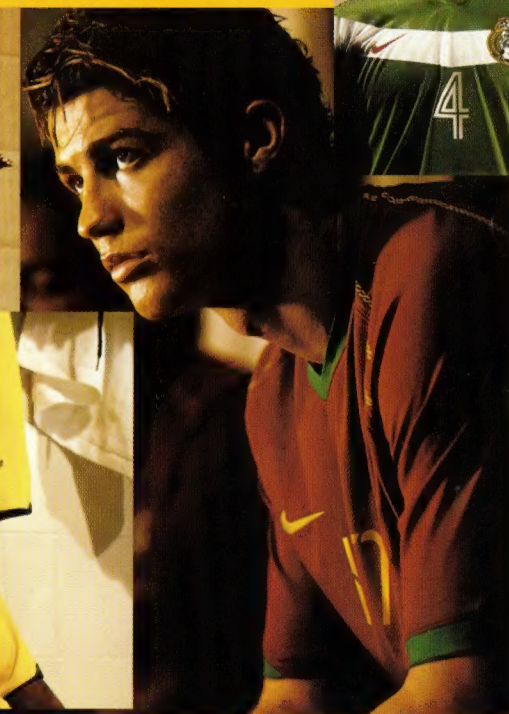
FINAL

Sun, July 9		Berlin	20:00
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Kick-off times are local



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